

*Women's and Gender History in
Global Perspective*



Exemplary Women and Sacred Journeys
Women and Gender in Judaism, Christianity, and
Islam from Late Antiquity to the Eve of Modernity

Julia Clancy-Smith



*American Historical Association
and the Committee on Women Historians
Washington, D.C.*

EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND SACRED JOURNEYS
WOMEN AND GENDER IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND
ISLAM FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE EVE OF MODERNITY

WOMEN'S AND GENDER HISTORY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A series by the American Historical Association's Committee on Women Historians, edited by Bonnie Smith

Currently available in this series:

East Asia (China, Japan, Korea)

Susan Mann

Women in Imperial, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Russia

Barbara Alpern Engel

Medieval Women in Modern Perspective

Judith M. Bennett

United States after 1865

Ellen Carol Dubois

Women in Early Modern and Modern Europe

Judith P. Zinsser and Bonnie S. Anderson

EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND SACRED JOURNEYS
WOMEN AND GENDER IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND
ISLAM FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE EVE OF MODERNITY

Julia Clancy-Smith

JULIA CLANCY-SMITH is an associate professor of history at the University of Arizona. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles. She has published *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (1994), which received three book awards; was co-editor of *Domesticating the Empire: Gender, Race, and Family Life in the Dutch and French Empires* (1998); and has been editor of *North Africa, Islam, and the Mediterranean World from the Almoravids to the Algerian War* (2001). She is co-editing a special issue of *French Historical Studies* devoted to the French Empire and completing a book on trans-Mediterranean settlement in nineteenth-century North Africa. She has another book underway on colonial education for girls in French North Africa. Her extended essay in comparative women/gender history and colonial cultures, "European Imperialism and Colonial Knowledge on Women in Islamic Cultures, c. 1750–1900," is part of the six-volume *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* edited by Suad Joseph.

Cover photographs: The image on the left, "Moroccan Woman and Child at a Saint's Shrine in Rabat, Morocco, 1990," is by the author Julia Clancy-Smith, and reprinted with her permission. The image in the center, "Indigenous Women in the Small Village of Corozal in Guatemala during the Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, on December 12, 2000," is by Christa Neuenhofer, and reprinted with Ms. Neuenhofer's permission; the AHA is grateful to her for its use. The image on the right, "Eastern European Jewish Women Praying at the Wailing Wall, Jerusalem, c. 1876–1885," is from the Bonfils Photographic Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, and reprinted with the Museum's permission.

AHA Editor: Noralee Frankel

Layout: Chris Hale

ISBN#: 0-87229-140-5

© 2006 American Historical Association

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine or newspaper.

Published in 2006 by the American Historical Association. As publisher, the American Historical Association does not adopt official views on any field of history and does not necessarily agree or disagree with the views expressed in this book.

Contents

FOREWORD	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES	2
❖ Women as Religious Exemplars in the Classroom	3
❖ Sacred Journeys and Travel in the Classroom	5
❖ Chronological and Geographical Limits	6
THE PROBLEM OF EVE	7
EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND SACRED JOURNEYS IN JUDAISM	8
❖ Historical Overview: The Experience of Exile	8
❖ Laws, Customs, and Gender Relations in Diaspora	10
❖ Exemplary Women in Scriptural and in Other Sources	11
❖ Women and Gender Norms in Europe	13
❖ Jewish Women in the Medieval Muslim World	15
❖ Saints (Zadikim), Pilgrims, and Pilgrimage	15
EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND PILGRIMAGE IN CHRISTIANITY	19
❖ Historical Overview: The Early Church	19
❖ Monasticism	20
❖ Exemplary Women	23
❖ Sacred Journeys: Pilgrimages and Saint Cults	25
EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND PILGRIMAGE IN ISLAM	27
❖ Historical Overview: Islamic Conquests, States, and Conversion	27
❖ Qur'an, Law, Custom, and Gender	29
❖ Exemplary Women	33
❖ Pilgrimages and Sacred Journeys	34
CONCLUSION	38
NOTES	41

Foreword

This series testifies to an exciting new stage in teaching women's and gender history. If the 1970s brought us the study of women's past, and the 1980s made us aware of gender, then the last decade of the millennium vividly highlighted the need for more global and comparative perspectives on both women's and gender history in our teaching and scholarship. We acknowledge the attempt of earlier histories of women—Lydia Maria Child's *History and Condition of Women*, for one example—to investigate the history of the world's women. But this series is devoted to surveying the most recent scholarship on women and gender in hopes of bringing teachers at all levels a practical understanding of new data, historical issues, and historiographical debates from around the world.

Activists have been at the forefront in developing this new perspective. During the international meetings of women that began in the 1970s, some participants, especially those from Central and South America, Africa, and Asia, made it clear that issues taken as normative by many U.S. and western European activists and scholars of women had little relevance when seen in global perspective. In this light, family, work, politics, and nation took on different meanings and entailed different considerations. Not only was Western ignorance highlighted during these meetings but an entire system of priorities and values was thrown into question. Nowhere was this more evident than in the study of history.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of state socialism in eastern Europe and central Asia have also challenged traditional research and writing. As scholarship on women and gender emerged from that region, it raised new historical questions, particularly concerning democratization, the free market, and citizenship. Although such topics are most pertinent to current politics, they have shifted scholars' attention to issues of citizenship and democratization in the past. Eastern European scholars, like their Western counterparts, are eager to address issues of historical evidence and feminism from a fresh point of view.

A global perspective naturally calls for examining the past from more than one point of view, but global studies are not that simple or straightforward. For some a global perspective has meant rethinking and integrating the history of all countries but the United States. By this view global history is best taught by specialists in the Chinese, African, or similarly non-U.S. past. In contrast, this series tries to integrate both North America and Europe into the global perspective. Our belief is that such a method will affect the way all history is taught and studied. Although nationally based research is the backbone of modern historical study, the global challenge—especially when seen through the prism of women and gender—should provide an exciting new frame of reference.

As mentioned above, women's activism has led to seeing history in a more inclusive, comparative manner. As well, it brings to light still another vantage point on globalism—thinking about our very nationalist bias in the writing and conceptualization of history. Transnational women's movements parallel such contemporary global phenomena as

migration, multinational corporations, communications, and ruling structures like the World Bank. However, these developments have been accompanied by new findings in world history that suggest the enduring nature not of nations but of globalism. The surprising constancy of global migration, cultural exchange, and the spread of disease and epidemics over tens of thousands of years opens new vistas for the history of women and gender. This series hopes to encourage gendered study in the exciting arena of world history.

A “global perspective” allows for several different approaches to women’s and gender history in the classroom. First, it can mean simply bringing to the fore historical material from most of the discrete areas of the globe. Reading the eleven regional pamphlets in this series provides an overview of women’s history from around the world and permits teachers to enrich the gender component in national and regional courses. A second step in guiding students to develop a global perspective is to encourage comparisons among the historical experiences of women from various continents, regions, and nations. The nine topical pamphlets on family, religion, race and ethnicity, and other subjects allow nearly any course to have a gender component. Critical insights develop when the study of such phenomena as nationalism or work contains material on women and gender. If the study of women and gender has helped to transform historical study, we believe that there is still more to be done—namely, opening for students a still wider window on the historical world.

A Ford Foundation grant for global women’s studies development provided funding for some of the preliminary work on this series; Tamara Matheson skillfully assisted in launching the project. The Committee on Women Historians and the editor gratefully acknowledge their support, and also the work of consultants in reviewing the pamphlets.

Series Editor

Bonnie Smith, Rutgers University

*Women have been central, not marginal, to the founding
and shaping of many of the world's religious traditions.
The task ahead for the history of women and religion is
the development of multiple narratives that document a full,
inclusive historical vision of the female presence.*

—Sue Morgan, “History”
Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion

INTRODUCTION

The notion of religion as a nontheological field of inquiry developed during the nineteenth century as part of a larger scientific interest in human societies. By definition, this perspective is Eurocentric and, when applied to non-Western belief systems, can deform the spiritual experiences of other religious communities, cultures, and cosmologies. The first lesson for students is that the category *religion* has its own history in modern Western intellectual thought. Moreover, students bring a number of unexamined assumptions to the study of religion. The most frequently encountered is that the historical processes identified with modernity—capitalism, secularism, and nation-states—have banished religion to the quiet backwaters of private belief or unbelief. Related to that, many have little formal instruction in the history of religions, comparative religions, or religious studies in general. Thus, mysticism, monasticism, or asceticism are unfamiliar concepts; notions basic to the sociology or anthropology of religion, such as ritual or pilgrimage, need explanation.

The women-gender-religion nexus poses another set of complications. Many students remain unclear as to what issues, approaches, and relationships are subsumed under the rubric *gender*. They assume that all religions, no matter how defined, have always and everywhere oppressed women, denying them agency because of the close imbrication between patriarchy and religion. Therefore, “The suggestion that Christianity can empower women seems implausible to many Western feminists. Some have concluded that Christianity is irredeemably patriarchal and have moved to a post-Christian stance.”¹

Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate whether religion is primarily to blame for women's oppression, given that religions have permitted varying degrees of female participation and allowed some women access to sacred knowledge. These questions are further complicated by the fact that women have historically been victors as well as victims, although the dichotomy is overly simplistic because empowerment and subordination are often simultaneous within a single religious tradition. In addition, scholarship on women, gender, and religion remains uneven. World religions practiced on a global scale receive more attention than ancient religions no longer in existence or contemporary micro-traditions.

Research since the 1980s has irrevocably transformed the way we think about women and world religions and religion in general. Scholarship on Christianity in medieval and early modern Europe is a case in point. Not only has it produced new appreciation of gender's significance to religion but it also has made substantial theoretical contributions to a number of related disciplines and subfields.² For example, nuanced research on the gendered significance of the body and food-related practices during the Middle Ages, by demonstrating that women's religious experience as such should be the point of departure for research, has produced a disciplinary shift. In contrast, research on gender in the medieval Greek Orthodox Church, for instance, is still relatively scanty, although studies on Byzantine women and hagiography exist. Succinctly stated, at present more scholarship is available on women than on gender in world religious traditions. Employing a comparative feminist approach, the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion* (1999) attests to concerted efforts to redress the situation.

The relationship between world history and gender history also merits reflection. As Ross E. Dunn sees it, "World history and gender related history have thrived during the past quarter century but until recently they have not had much influence on one another."³ Since the early 1990s, the world history movement has achieved noteworthy success in globalizing curricula. Yet macro-level world systems approaches—Big History—tend to write women and gender relations out of the story. Indeed, the integration of women into the historical narrative is often inversely related to the scale of analysis. For the modern era, religion as a force in world history drops out of textbook narratives because deep shifts in political economies or new cosmologies of science and technology are deemed more significant. If religion lies partially within the realm of the history of ideas, its powerful role in social praxis, organization, and legitimation—above all, in matters pertaining to gender—needs emphasis. Most important, when gender theory informs the study of religion, however defined, other seemingly self-evident verities become less certain.

DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES

A universally valid definition for religion across historical time and cultural space does not exist. Nevertheless, scholars of women and gender history have complicated the notion of religion, which is now viewed as inseparable from patriarchy and patriarchal systems of domination in most, if not all, world traditions. These assertions serve as provocative starting points but do not solve the problem of where to begin or what to include or exclude. To better tame an unwieldy topic, I draw upon my own classroom experience and scholarship that suggest a theme: "exemplary women and sacred journeys in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from late Antiquity to the eve of modernity." Combining these two related, although not coterminous, dimensions of the religious experience opens windows into complex spiritual beliefs, religious ideologies, and social practices—sacred journeys, pilgrimages, shrine cults, and pilgrims, on the one hand, and exemplary women and their sociohistorical constructions as objects of pilgrimage, saints, pious women, patronesses, or good wives and mothers, on the other.

In addition, representations of pious women were invariably constructed in relation to exemplary men—Abraham, Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad—whose memory was commemorated by scripture or by sacred travel and accounts of those travels, composed mainly by men. Virtuous women have not only been defined implicitly or explicitly against male exemplars but also against insubordinate, disorderly, or dangerous females—the Jezebels and Mary Magdalenes of history. Together these themes open onto a wide range of related topics appropriate for studying other religious systems.

The shared similarities as well as differences between the three traditions are sufficiently numerous to justify the comparative methodology. All are monotheistic with revealed scriptures, a masculine deity, purity-pollution taboos, and pilgrimage traditions, yet neither Judaism nor Islam have ordained clergies as such. Mysticism is present in all three religions, but both Islam and Judaism reject monasticism. It is significant that they share three fundamental assumptions undergirding the notion of divinely ordained male superiority and female inferiority: Man—and not woman—represents God's primary creation; woman was primarily responsible for the Fall; and, finally, "Woman was created not only *from* man but also *for* man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not fundamental."⁴

Monotheism has identified God with maleness, an identification that has held significant social, cultural, and historical consequences for women and men. Detecting transformations in gender ideologies ostensibly sanctioned by divine favor is difficult because they are usually depicted as eternal and thus not subject to change. Subordinate female status has historically been legitimized by appeals to core religio-spiritual beliefs and legal dictates—even when a specific unfavorable gender norm may have been originally "exterior" to a particular religious tradition. Nevertheless, even the masculinity of the divinity was not immutable. The relative gender equality suggested by the early gospels or the notion of "Jesus as mother," for example, contrast with the unambiguous masculinity of God. Thus, the discourses on gender have been "contradictory, internally riven, and at odds," and the resultant social constructions and practices far from static.⁵

My principal objectives here are, first, to demonstrate how and why religious ideologies as well as social practices can, in some contexts, empower women and yet in others subordinate them and, second, to understand how larger historical forces alter the balance between subordination and empowerment, provoking shifts in the constructions of exemplary women as well as in sanctioned forms of female religiosity, particularly sacred movement or pilgrimage. At the same time, local variations within all three religious traditions—the idea of religion as locally understood and lived—are considered to avoid essentialized views of complex historical and cultural phenomena.

WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS EXEMPLARS IN THE CLASSROOM

Juxtaposing female religio-spiritual exemplars with and against the masculine character of the divinity introduces provocative questions into classroom discussion. The topic also leads to the issue of extraordinary versus ordinary women and men in history and how to recover their pasts despite class and other distinctions and

status-gender hierarchies. Many paragons of virtue began life as humble or even reviled individuals—sinners or prostitutes—and although the monotheistic religions profess spiritual equality, sharp class and gender differences have always existed. Collective historical memory, and the political armature expressing that memory, privileges some individuals' lives over others. Patronesses have been important in nearly all religious traditions, although philanthropic activities frequently, but not exclusively, are recorded and thus remembered for women of elevated social rank.

Because the generosity of patronesses often found expression in physical landmarks such as buildings or monuments, the historical record of their munificence has been retained. This contrasts with charity associated mainly with the domestic sphere. As Leslie C. Orr observes, "Much of women's patronage and sponsorship of religious activity in the domestic or community setting—a Buddhist, Jain, or Hindu woman's offering of food to a mendicant at her doorstep, Muslim woman's distribution of alms during Ramadan or her hosting of a gathering of women in her home to hear stories of the saints, a Jewish woman's visit to a sick person or her embroidering of Torah covers for the synagogue, a Christian woman's mending and laundering of the clothes of the poor—goes virtually unnoticed."⁶

Saints, uncommonly holy men and women, represent another category of exemplary individuals present in most religious traditions and cast in roles of mystics, ascetics, miracle workers, and healers. Catholicism's institutionalized procedures for recognizing saints and its official saint "list" would appear to render sainthood somewhat unique. Islam and Judaism, like Protestantism, have historically been uneasy with devotions to the very special dead, which can compromise God's unity. Due to popular consensus from below, however, persons regarded as exceptionally close to God have been venerated and remembered in Judaism and Islam. Until the rise of modernity in the Middle East and North Africa, Jews, Muslims, and Christians held saints in common, honoring them in shared shrines and pilgrimages frequently condemned as "popular" by disapproving observers. Local Catholic communities have always revered persons, living and deceased, blessed with heroic piety without the Church's validation. Finally, holy persons raise the issue of subaltern or "populist" beliefs and practices that were frequently identified by male religious authorities with suspect female religiosity to discredit or devalue their spiritual importance.

Mystics and visionaries, at times conflated with saints, are found in all three traditions and pose roughly similar problems, although mysticism has offered relatively more outlets for female religiosity in Christianity and Islam than Judaism. A mystic's heightened spiritual enthusiasm suggested that salvation could be achieved without benefit of clergy and sacraments or of the sacred law and its interpreters. The mystical path to enlightenment and unity with the divine has theoretically been open to men and women, but female mystics provoked disquiet because the spiritually empowered sometimes transgressed gender norms. Whether punitive measures were directed against overly enthusiastic mystics and saints, male and female, was a function of historical context and social circumstance.

Exemplary individuals also haunt the realms of the heretic and heresy. Often the lines between witch and holy person, cunning women, wise men, and malevolent beings were blurred. Because women have historically been considered more prone to doctrinal error and heretical belief, their exclusion from religious authority has been justified on that basis. In some cases the label *heterodox* has been applied to movements solely because women occupied leadership positions. In large measure, the early Church secured the boundaries between orthodox and non-orthodox communities by progressively excluding women from sacerdotal offices. Finally, the lives of pious men and women have been recreated through pilgrimage of one kind or another. Spiritual experience as performance becomes more visible through participation in saint cults, whether expressed in collective veneration or individual supplication. Ordinary people have always made sacred journeys, although traveling less frequently and widely due to economic or other constraints. Sacred journeys signify breaks in time or liminal moments when rules governing ordinary life might be temporarily suspended, in turn illuminating partially concealed gender ideologies and practices.

SACRED JOURNEYS AND TRAVEL IN THE CLASSROOM

Most religions have a culture of sacred movement. Pilgrimage, a spatial, temporal, and spiritual displacement of mind and body, also entails acts of imagination. Because pilgrimage functions as a huge intake for diverse people, pilgrims, like migrants or invaders, carry new or different ideas, skills, commodities, and information. States and ruling elites have always sought to control pilgrims as well as objects, spaces, and places of pilgrimage. Profane motives inspired even the most pious pilgrims, who might, under certain conditions, turn into holy combatants or warriors for the faith; sacred travel could also be manipulated for political or personal ends. And pilgrimage has always been (and is today) very much about identity.

In the past, pilgrimages to the exemplary centers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam represented “hemispheric” events because individuals and groups from across Afro-Eurasia made the journey. That pilgrimage, commerce, and trade have always been closely associated is well documented. Trade diasporas, inevitably linked to religious minorities like the Armenian Christians and Jews in the Middle East, were connected to local and translocal pilgrimages, often facilitating them.

Looking at pilgrimage comparatively over time also raises the issue of changes in modes of transportation for travelers to Mecca, Jerusalem, Lourdes, Rome, or Compostela and the related question of gender and movement. Did women travel and perform pilgrimage in the same way that men did? When considering the scriptural-theological imperatives for ritual voyages, it is important to consider how gender norms historically shaped cultures of religious journeys and, conversely, how cultures of sacred travel have defined women’s relationship to the transcendent.

Because most societies have historically controlled and limited women’s physical movements and activities, female religiosity often found fuller expression in local pilgrimage and cults. These provide windows into religion as received by women and men as well as sites for recovering the sociocultural values of ordinary people. Various types of sacred objects—for example, portable shrines containing statues or relics and carried in procession—were associated with local cults. In many societies, women create, maintain, and pray at household shrines within the confines of the home.

Female-dominated religious activities have at times been denounced as “profane” or “unorthodox” because they were performed in domestic settings, largely outside clerical or male control. Currently, feminist scholars are questioning rigid dichotomies between the sacred and profane, between the sacred and domestic, precisely because these marginalize women’s religious experience.

Finally, sacred journeys and holy persons are directly linked to hagiography, biography, and autobiography. The performance of pilgrimage sometimes occasioned a personal narrative of the soul, resulting in social recognition of individual spiritual virtuosity. For women, the matter of voice, authorship, authenticity, and censorship immediately arises when considering these genres. Many pious women’s lives were narrated exclusively by men and largely for male audiences in certain periods.

CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITS

This essay deals mainly with the periods from late antiquity to the eve of modernity, a chronological choice that demands some explanation. From roughly the seventh century C.E. onward, monotheistic traditions coexisted more or less side by side in the Near or Middle East, Africa, the Mediterranean world, parts of Europe, and (to a lesser extent) in Asia. These centuries witnessed expanding networks of communication and exchange produced by migrations, the extension and consolidation of trade routes, and the proselytizing of missionaries of new faiths or “heretical” offshoots of established faiths (such as the Nestorians). What resulted was transregional, hemispheric borrowings unprecedented in scale. The elaboration of the Silk Road, trans-Saharan routes, and the Indian Ocean system meant that people, products, and technologies circulated ever more widely and, with them, philosophies, cosmologies, ideas, practices, and customs. I will focus on the geocultural regions of Western Asia, Northern Africa, and Western Europe.

I chose to concentrate on the period from late antiquity to the eve of modernity because material for classroom use is more difficult to find for women, gender, and religion in premodern societies. Sources for the modern, and particularly the contemporary, era are abundant and fairly easy to access for teachers; I list some in the bibliography. Moreover, the centuries from late antiquity to the cusp of modernity are important in and of themselves. Religious and secular authorities have historically appealed to the distant past—often portrayed as a golden age—to justify women’s continued subordination. Feminists and others seeking to change prevailing gender norms now carefully scrutinize these same distant epoches to rebut the notion that earlier core beliefs and “unchanging” practices sanctioned women’s inferior position.

The essay ends on the threshold of the modern era, although scholars contest the notion of modernity because it represents a highly uneven set of processes whose origins, meanings, and impact varied widely across geocultural regions. The nature of the state and political economy, social class structures, levels of education and literacy, resource structures, and patriarchal systems either fostered or impeded—or both—the complex historical processes known as modernity. Thus, the historical narrative ends in slightly different periods for each community of faith. In any case, the methodology that follows can be usefully applied to historical periods and religions not dealt with here.

THE PROBLEM OF EVE

Shared by all three traditions is the exemplary mother, Eve, and father, Adam, although each offers differing versions of the creation story. As important, however, the tale of the first man and woman has been employed by interpreters of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to vindicate women's subordination to men—and less frequently to justify gender equality. Initial creation accounts in Genesis 1 present human beings as either male or female but created at the same time. In subsequent accounts, Eve is fashioned by God from one of Adam's ribs. Moreover, in Genesis 3, Eve is the first to be seduced by the serpent, partaking of the forbidden fruit that she presses upon her spouse. Punishment by expulsion is visited upon both Adam and Eve, but God's retribution is gendered. Adam will labor in the fields, and Eve will suffer the pains of birth, of reproductive labor. In the Qur'an, the story is somewhat different. Eve does not spring from Adam's rib; both are equally culpable of yielding to temptation and shoulder equal blame for paradise lost. Nevertheless, interpretations of the creation story—as opposed to the narrative itself—have shown remarkable convergence over time in the three religious traditions.

In Judaism, "Rabbinic exegesis connects the Hebrew name for Eve with the Aramaic word for serpent (*hewya*), suggesting that the serpent was Eve's undoing as Eve was Adam's."⁷ Early Church fathers held that humankind's fall from grace was specifically due to Eve's sinful actions. Indeed, when theologians met at the Council of Orange in 529 C.E. to expound the doctrine of original sin, Eve was cast not only as the one who caused Adam's downfall but also as the first sinner. Despite the Quranic account, later Muslim thinkers, perhaps under the sway of Judeo-Christian thinking, reinterpreted the creation story to maintain that woman, responsible for the loss of paradise, was created from the most crooked part of Adam's rib.

Traditionally, female nature has been portrayed as the antithesis of male nature and female sexuality in negative opposition to male sexuality. That had important ramifications, because societies have always linked religious duties with specified sexual practices. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam shared similar—in some cases, identical—views of female nature until recently, which is hardly surprising given their common origins. Religious texts as well as widely held customs, beliefs, and ideologies from the ancient Near East and pagan or Hellenic Mediterranean world conflated woman with the realms of nature, the body, the physical, and, above all, pollution, temptation, and the irrational. Early Christian authorities, especially Augustine, reproduced the opinions of classical philosophers who believed that "only the male is the true image of God."⁸ Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious authorities as well as ordinary people, male and female, believed that women were sexually insatiable, lacked self-mastery over desire, and, in consequence, would entertain sexual relations with any man if not controlled by various means.

This construction of the "bad woman" whose voracious appetites demand constant male surveillance by fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons serves as a counter-model to the notion of the good woman or exemplary female. Given the majority opinion regarding women's innate sexual irresponsibility, chastity was a major component in the construction of the ideal woman, particularly in view of widespread concerns with purity of lineages. Islam and Judaism, however, differ markedly from Christianity in one important dimension of sexuality. Both are hostile to the notion of celibacy,

particularly for women (but also for men) because only marriage guarantees social order and procreation. For Christian women (as also in Buddhist thinking), chastity, institutionalized through vows of celibacy associated with membership in a religious order or community, paradoxically liberated women from male control expressed in marriage. The fundamental reason for the pre-Reformation Church's exaltation of virgin martyrs and chaste females should be seen for what it was—a manifestation of long-standing contempt for, and fear of, women's sexuality.

The social fear of female sexuality and reproductive functions undergirded elaborate pollution and purity codes surrounding the female body. Indeed, Orthodox Judaism, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam still maintain strict taboos concerning ritual uncleanness during menses that limit women's participation in religious activities. Finally, dissident religious groups have employed purity-pollution taboos to more sharply delineate their movements from mainstream thinking. Some North African Jewish micro-communities, for example, evinced exaggerated concern with female ritual purity to signal their difference from the Jewish majority, and Jewish communities in Eastern Europe have observed extremely rigorous requirements for female purification. In Islam, certain Shi'ite groups have interpreted and observed purity-pollution codes for women in ways that distinguish them as dissenters.

Negative views of female nature and sexuality are found in most of the world's religious traditions and have been deployed to justify the naturalness of women's subordination. By representing women as dangerous, weak, evil, lustful, and disorderly, their exclusion from positions of religious authority or from full participation in society is justified. Although the Jewish Eve differs from the Christian Eve—and the Quran does not specifically name Eve—biblical accounts of creation have been continually drawn upon throughout the centuries to enjoin patterns of social order and enforce the “nature of maleness and femaleness.”⁹

EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND SACRED JOURNEYS IN JUDAISM

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE EXPERIENCE OF EXILE

Political subjugation, exile, and dispersion have shaped gender relations in Judaism because local Jewish communities were inevitably influenced by the dominant states and cultures under which they lived. Between 63 B.C.E., when Judea was incorporated into the Roman Empire, and the twentieth century, no politically independent Jewish states existed. Following the Temple's desolation in 70 C.E., the centers of Jewish religious and communal life were synagogues, courts, rabbinic academies (*yeshivot*), ritual baths (*mikva'ot*), and the household; the home represented a particularly important space for female religious observance. Between Jerusalem's final destruction and the fourth century, Jews were forbidden to set foot in the city, renamed Aelia Capitolina by the Romans. One consequence was that pilgrimage to the exemplary center of Judaism was impossible for several centuries, and local pilgrimages grew in importance. In addition to Palestine, communities of Jews long resided in Arabia, Central Asia, China, India, and Africa. In view of the vastness and longevity of the Persian empires, Iran was second only to Palestine in importance because Jews have resided there for some 2,700 years. From Persia, they moved to India and China or north to Russia.

Jews residing along the Mediterranean Coast from Egypt to Spain represented one of the largest diaspora groups, although some African Jews traced their roots to the Punic or Carthaginian period (c. 814 B.C.E.–146 B.C.E.). Under Roman, Byzantine, Vandal, and subsequent Islamic rule (i.e., from the seventh century C.E. on), Jewish communities were found in the countryside and in cities. After the Arab-Islamic conquests, many Jews gradually became Arabized, retaining their faith and cultural uniqueness as well as developing a vernacular language. In North Africa, a smaller number, mainly those who lived in the mountains or in deserts, spoke Berber.

During the Byzantine Empire, Jews appear to have made up 1 to 2 percent of the population, and they continued to do so under early and classical Islamic states. They fared much worse under the Orthodox Church and Byzantine rule compared to the situation under most Islamic empires or states. Thus, diversity marked Jewish communities in the Middle East and elsewhere; nowhere did they form a monolithic group. In that diversity the gender norms and relations in force in a particular local Jewish community helped distinguish among diasporic groups.

During the High Middle Ages (c. 900–1200 C.E.), sustained interactions between North African and Middle Eastern Jews produced complex ties linking Muslim Spain and the Mediterranean Basin with South Asia. Jewish trading diasporas facilitated commerce between the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Indian Ocean and Central Asia. One principal element structuring these communities was marriage; the exchange of Jewish women as marriage partners assured that far-flung families remained tightly knit and networks operated. Contacts with Muslim states, elites, and ordinary people were also close and, in cities, occurred on a daily basis, extending even into Islamic law courts.

The fortunes of Jews of the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Spain were heavily influenced by events in Europe, particularly the Crusades (1095–1291) and the Reconquista (1085–1492). The situation of Spanish Jews (and Muslims) began to deteriorate in 1391 with the persecution of the Jews of Castile, Catalonia, and the Balearic Islands, which provoked a wave of emigration to North Africa. During the fifteenth century, Muslim kingdoms in Algeria and Tunisia provided havens for Spanish Jews, as did parts of Europe such as Dutch cities. With the fall of the kingdom of Granada in 1492, Morocco and the Ottoman Empire became sites for Iberian Jewish settlement due to massive expulsions and persecution.

In Europe, it appears that until the eleventh century social mingling across religious lines transpired between Jews and Christians; otherwise, constant denunciations by church officials would have been unnecessary. The situation of European Jews deteriorated due to the Reconquista, Crusades, and Inquisition, all related events. By 1215 and the Fourth Lateran Council, strict regulations forbade intermarriage between Jews and Christians. Sexual relations were severely punished as adultery because such contacts between a Christian and an “inferior” Jew resulted in a doubly polluting act. Increasing legal and professional restrictions, including sumptuary laws, made the position of many European Jews more precarious than ever. In the late thirteenth century, expulsions occurred from England and elsewhere in Europe and continued until 1492.

Global crises such as the mid-fourteenth-century bubonic plague brought catastrophe to European Jewry. As was true elsewhere, in parts of France the outbreak of the Black Death in 1349 was blamed on Jews. In Strasbourg, rumor had it that they had poisoned water supplies; on St. Valentine's Day two thousand were burnt to death on a platform erected in their cemetery. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire welcomed exiled Jews from all over Europe—Iberian, French, Italian, and German—and there they generally flourished until the late nineteenth century.

LAWS, CUSTOMS, AND GENDER RELATIONS IN DIASPORA

Some scholars characterize the practice of Judaism after 70 C.E. as the gradual transition from a temple-based to home-based religion in some respects. The Jewish household became infused with a semisacred importance because women's prayers, key rituals, and legal observances—such as compliance with laws for food preparation—took place within the home and under women's supervision. The separation between Judaism and Christianity occurred gradually during the first centuries C.E., but growing animosity from the era of Justinian (who reigned from 527 to 565) onward brought restrictions on building synagogues as well as public worship and preaching.

Those processes may have hastened the shift from temple to home, with important consequences for women and religion as lived. Of utmost importance to Jewish communities whether in the Middle East, North Africa, or Europe was the meticulous observance of Jewish law (*halakhah*) and tradition in daily life and during collective celebrations. If a community was numerically small or isolated, careful observance was all the more critical for survival. In contrast to Christian theology, which emphasizes dogma, Judaism emphasizes law, ritual, practice, and exegesis, a concern shared by Islam as well. For women and gender relations in Judaism, revealed scripture, legal codes, and oral traditions present interpretive problems similar to those in other religious systems.

The Mishna is a multivolume legal code produced by rabbis in the first two centuries C.E. from earlier oral interpretations of scripture. Subsequent commentaries on the Mishna formed the Palestinian (c. 400) and Babylonian Talmud (c. 500), a vast legal and prescriptive corpus. As the authoritative basis for religious Judaism, this represents the basis for leading a moral and ethical existence. The legal part of Talmudic literature, interpreted in responsa literature, governed ritual, spiritual, and ceremonial observances of individuals and collectivities. Because religious law determined family life, purity taboos, and dietary and sacrificial regulations, it had enormous impact on women and gender relations. In the Middle East and North Africa, religious law generally remained in force until at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

Until the rise of modern Judaism around 1750 in Europe, women were not permitted to lead public worship or interpret Jewish law. Moreover, some authorities understood the Mishna to mean that teaching sacred texts to women was prohibited, although that has been disputed. Rabbinic law does not require women to take part in services held at a synagogue, although they are required to hear Torah reading. In Middle Eastern or North African cities, towns, or villages, the synagogue

was the center of community life, and children were sent to rabbinic schools for primary education. Advanced studies for boys were available at the yeshiva, which trained the rabbinical elite.

Before the modern era in both Sephardi and Ashkenazi synagogues, women participated in public prayer only if a space apart was provided—a partition, balcony, or separate room. This was due to the belief, found also in Islam, that any female presence constituted a sexual presence and thus a distraction to male worship. Yet in Middle Eastern villages, and even in some urban areas, synagogues did not necessarily offer special sections for women. In these cases women and girls observed the festivities of Sabbath or major holidays from the outside, listening through windows or doors.

Scholars now debate the origins of male-female segregation. Some maintain that the enforced separation of the sexes at communal public prayer dates to the Second Temple, whereas others see it as a more recent practice. Women and girls could also gather collectively for pious purposes in cemeteries. (For Muslim women in the same region, weekly outings to cemeteries to honor deceased family members was also an important social occasion.) Directly related to weekly family grave visits were the ritualized visits, accompanied by prayers, to tomb-shrines of the “special dead,” observances that Middle Eastern Jewry shared with Christians and Muslims.

Prayer has always been important for Jewish women, although its frequency and form have varied because of obligations to spouses, children, kin, and community. Rabbinic authorities did not obligate women to pray at specified times of the day because of conflicts with family duties, although most held that praying at least once daily was required. Learned women prayed formally in Hebrew; illiterate women memorized prayers read aloud to them from the Hebrew prayer book and followed female prayer leaders in devotions. Prayers always accompanied the rituals—baking challah and blessing Sabbath candles or performing the ritual bath (*mikvah*)—incumbent upon women. Mundane as well as important life-cycle stages were marked by prayers frequently incorporating biblical figures and finding inspiration for ordinary women’s daily travails in scriptural role models. “Indeed,” observes Sylvia Barack Fishman, “the biblical Hannah’s heartfelt prayer was considered by Talmudic sages to exemplify correct and effective communication with God.”¹⁰

EXEMPLARY WOMEN IN SCRIPTURAL AND IN OTHER SOURCES

Some of the earliest accounts of exemplary women’s lives are found in Hebrew scripture—Sarah, Miriam, Esther, Deborah, and Jael, for example. Although five females are named as prophets in the Hebrew Bible, they predate the period of literate prophecy, and their voices are unrecorded although gender norms are evidenced in their stories. Feminist historians have begun analyzing these stories through the lens of gender theory. Deborah, prophet and judge in the twelfth to eleventh centuries B.C.E., was credited with delivering the Israelites from Canaanite oppression, which suggests female leadership.

Scholars of religion also employ literary and linguistic analysis to reveal new meanings in biblical stories, for example, how and why Deborah and Jael were celebrated as heroines possessed of uncommon courage and virtue. More recent studies of the Book of Judges posit that ancient Israel’s political economy—a decentralized,

largely agrarian-pastoral society without rigid class structures—explains women's relative freedom and autonomy. Three closely related elements emerge as determinants of women's status within socioreligious systems: the nature of hierarchies, state formation, and political economy. Some argue that limitations on women's participation in religious and social life were written into the Torah later by elite scholars who resided in cities, inevitably associated with complex, bureaucratic states and a high degree of stratification. The establishment of the Temple promoted a religious class—the priesthood—that excluded women and most men from office.

Women are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible almost exclusively in terms of relationships to men, whether as mother, wife, daughter, or sister. Stories of ancient Jewish women in scripture were reproduced and reinterpreted over the centuries as models for ideal social behavior, although we lack ample documentation as to how female audiences understood the stories. A twelfth-century funeral speech honoring a noble Jewish lady from Cairo, for example, extolled the deceased's memory, equating her with the biblical Naomi. The comparison was elicited because the Cairene woman had shown exceptional kindness to her daughter-in-law in the same way that Naomi had nurtured Ruth, "a foreigner from the Land of Moab."¹¹

As with other sacred scriptures, the Hebrew Bible is replete with parables about the social chaos created by disorderly women who violated the moral lessons taught by exemplary woman. Biblical gender analysis demonstrates that the term *zonah* (prostitute) was broadly applied to women who were not "relational"—Jezebel, Tamar, and those whose sole fault was being too assertive. They were not, that is, protected by (or subordinate to) men. Because Christian and Islamic scriptures draw upon the Hebrew Bible, many gendered moral tales inform the sacred texts of the two successor traditions.

Documentation on Jewish women and gender in the late Roman and early Christian periods is found in the New Testament, particularly the Gospels. Inscriptions from synagogues of the era offer compelling evidence that women were not only patronesses or donors but also acceded to leadership positions, including *archisynagogue* (head of the synagogue). Despite evidence of women as leaders, the attributes of the exemplary woman—whether in pagan Roman, rabbinic, or patristic literature—were remarkably alike. A first-century Roman woman's epitaph, describing her as "pious, chaste, thrifty, faithful, a stayer-at-home," represented a universal ideal, as did "fruitful as a vine" in view of devastating mortality rates.¹² Survival depended upon the preservation of the Jewish family, which dictated endogamy. Mixed marriages between Jewish men and non-Jewish brides were to be avoided because mothers determined their children's religious identity.

As in other traditions, control over women's sexuality and reproduction was critical and thus the emphasis upon chastity. Although variations existed in Jewish sexual practices, the rabbis approved of the enjoyment of a disciplined sexuality for men and women. Only in marriage, defined as a contractual partnership reflecting God's relationship with Israel, could the disorders of the sexual instinct be tamed. A sacred relationship, marriage constituted a contract and not a sacrament, as in Christianity. Thus divorce was possible, although dissolving a marriage contract was

generally only a husband's privilege. Legal and social mechanisms for initiating marriage focused on the consignment of a nubile girl from her father's house to that of her husband, a transaction that normally also entailed an exchange of property.

In Europe, polygyny among Jews was acceptable until the eleventh century, when it was forbidden by Rabbi Gershom b. Judah. It continued in North Africa and the Middle East, as did concubinage. The Jewish (and Muslim) position on human sexuality opposes the early Christian value placed on celibacy as enunciated by Paul and others. Nevertheless, all three traditions viewed ideal womanhood as motherhood; in this way, social constructions of the exemplary woman served patriarchal functions. Fertility was a sign of God's favor; barrenness, a shameful state expressing divine disapproval, could lead to divorce.

An appreciation of the degree of divergence between ideal and real gender relations depends on the nature of available historical evidence, including archaeology, material culture, financial registers, business or personal letters of commercial diasporas in Afro-Eurasia, and the records of non-Jewish states or authorities governing Jewish communities. Social rank, age or generation, and race or ethnicity were determining influences on women's lives, as were marital status and fertility levels. Divorced women or widows often enjoyed more control over their destinies than married women. Times of crisis or unusual historical events often attenuated—even contradicted—ritual, legal, and ethical prescriptions found in biblical and Talmudic literature.

Rebellious groups tend to be well documented. As in other religions, dissident or charismatic sects within Judaism, often embracing organized asceticism and/or mysticism, afforded women more religious space and even leadership roles—if only temporarily. A first-century Jewish community of ascetics, the Therapeutae founded in Egypt, permitted female members to engage in scholarship, and some even formed their own monastic establishments. The movement was similar to a slightly later (the second half of the second century C.E.) Christian millenarian community, the Montanists, which also allowed women to act as prophets.

Although female imagery is preponderant in mystical literature, Jewish women have generally not played a part in creating that literature or in visionary or ecstatic devotions, a contrast with Christianity. An unnamed female celibate, visionary, and mystic from twelfth-century Baghdad, however, was the focal point for a messianic upheaval inspired by her visions during the 1120s. Before the uprising, rabbinical authorities in Baghdad arranged for her marriage because, it was believed, her visions were the product of sexual renunciation and overly rigorous ascetic practices. Once she was wed and forced to abandon self-imposed celibacy, or so it was reasoned, the visions would cease.

WOMEN AND GENDER NORMS IN EUROPE

Early modern Spain offers a striking example of the relationship between crisis and women's access to sacral functions. The centuries-long Reconquista, tied to European state-building and overseas expansion, the Inquisition, and forced conversions of Jews worked to temporarily undermine rabbinic authority. A Portuguese widow, Doña

Gracia Nasi (1510–1569), a patroness of rabbinical academies, put her family fortune in the service of crypto-Jews, subsequently taking her family to the Dutch Republic and finally the Ottoman Empire for safety. Because of Judaism's domestic-centered nature, women were especially active in crypto-Judaism, keeping faith and rituals alive in secret within the household. Visionary or messianic movements coalesced around some women-led crypto-Jewish groups in Portugal and Spain, as documents from the Inquisition proceedings have revealed. Iberia during the latter stages of the Reconquista confirms the modification of male religious authority and the gender norms and prescriptions flowing from that authority, ignoring or blatantly disregarding them during times of upheaval. Yet periods of crisis can have the opposite effect.

There are many more cases of women who overcame, flouted, or openly challenged gender restrictions, although once again the problem of historical sources comes into play. Nevertheless, most Jewish women strove to exemplify the ideal of Jewish womanhood while negotiating personal and religious autonomy. Within a highly patriarchal world they carved out spaces as patronesses, organizers of charity, and businesswomen as well as healers, midwives, wise women, and teachers of other women. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany, the wives of rabbis, Dulce and Urania of Worms, achieved considerable learning and acted as prayer leaders for circles of Jewish women, although both were empowered by association with revered religious leaders.

The interpretation of sacred texts and mastery of Hebrew were still reserved for men, but some Jewish women were literate and had prayer books written specifically for them in Yiddish in late medieval and early modern Europe. The printed devotional material suggests that women transformed domestic celebrations associated with Sabbath or holy days, such as the baking of the ritual bread, into sacerdotal acts through their own prayers and readings of scripture.

Some middle-class Jewish women were actively involved in family commerce, which demanded not only business skills but also literacy in various vernacular European languages, and notarized contracts reveal that they had prominent roles in financial operations essential for family survival. A representative example comes from late fourteenth-century Venice, where Jewish traders were only permitted to engage in money-lending during a period of crisis. Guorela Rapin took part in independent loan transactions: "She and other women obviously had considerable freedom to operate on their own, for we find them coming and going, and granting power of attorney to persons meant to act in their name during their absence."¹³ Under certain circumstances, women could appear in court; wife-beating was frowned upon when it was not condemned by rabbis; and marital rape was proscribed. And, in contrast to Christian women, rabbinical rulings permitted the use of contraceptive devices under certain circumstances.

Nevertheless, visions of the bad woman persisted and reflected larger social currents surrounding Jewish communities. The thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim* (*Book of the Pious*) written in German provides a fascinating window into medieval male views of woman. Judith Baskin notes that unfavorable representations of female nature long present in Talmudic traditions were "intensified." Women were not only portrayed as "untrustworthy, sources of sexual temptation, and demonic" but also as prone to "sorcery and witchcraft . . . even the most pious women has the potential, however

unwitting, to tempt a man to sin or sinful thoughts.” Negative images were also found in medieval Jewish mysticism or Kabbalah literature, where the women, unrestrained by male control, and menstrual blood are conflated with “demonic forces responsible for evil in the world.”¹⁴

JEWISH WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL MUSLIM WORLD

The social, economic, and cultural lives of Jews living around the Mediterranean Basin, particularly Cairo and Egypt, from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries emerge from the Geniza documents. In these sources of a primarily religio-legal or financial nature, Jewish women rarely speak for themselves because most were illiterate, or, if literate, they normally spoke through male guardians. A close reading, however, reveals that some oversaw not only their children’s well-being but also their formal education. Moreover, merchants, Jewish and otherwise, traded in far-flung commercial networks and were frequently away for years at a time, so women were obliged to assume managerial functions at home. Wealthy Cairene women acted as patronesses by furnishing richly made Torah scrolls or designating a share of their inheritance to cemeteries, synagogues, or other religious purposes. Women of ordinary means donated objects, money, time, skills, or their labor to the upkeep of synagogues and shrines, although the record is less abundant. Regardless of class, motherhood, particularly the birth of sons, conferred status and authority.

At the level of ordinary people, the customs, attitudes, and lifestyle of Middle Eastern Jewry hardly differed from non-Jewish neighbors; “superstitions” such as the evil eye were held both by Jews and Muslims. Jews under Islamic rule observed some of the sexual and gender norms and practices of the majority. Some Jewish women enjoyed divorce rights and were even able to initiate divorce proceedings—not always the case elsewhere. Jewish women’s freedom of physical movement in public spaces, however, may have been limited compared to Europe, although their sexual segregation was less restrictive than for Muslim women. In large Middle Eastern cities, Jewish and Muslim families resided in the same neighborhoods or even shared domestic compounds, and at times there was discord; the more relaxed attitude toward sexual mixing within Jewish households clashed with Islamic norms about sexual segregation. Some Jewish husbands attempted to impose unusually strict seclusion upon wives, who were allowed to leave the house only for prayers and ritual bathing.

Jewish women of ordinary or middling social ranks frequently played important socioeconomic roles in local communities as healers, midwives, entertainers, small retailers, and brokers, often serving Muslim neighbors and clients. Thus they forged critical patron-client ties, acting as mediators between different religious groups, which might offer some measure of protection during times of crisis. Finally, Middle Eastern Jews and Muslims sometimes participated together in saint cults—a major difference from Europe and one that directly involved female religiosity.

SAINTS (ZADIKIM), PILGRIMS, AND PILGRIMAGE

In Judaism, pilgrimage represents travel to God’s presence as embodied in sacred text and place. Pilgrimage to the exemplary center was forbidden until the fourth century, but with Islamic rule from the seventh century onward, Jews were more or less free to

travel to Jerusalem. Historical evidence for travel to the Holy Land during the period under consideration exists in the Geniza documents and wills from European Jews during the late medieval and early modern eras. It was common for those nearing the end of their lives, particularly men, to depart for the Holy Land to die and be buried (the same was true for Christian pilgrims). Jewish women who performed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem earned an honorific title after returning, a practice perhaps reflecting Islamic influence.

Pilgrimage to, and residence in, Jerusalem became easier for both Jewish women and men after the Ottoman conquest of Palestine in 1516. Under the Ottomans, Jews from the Middle East and North Africa journeyed to Jerusalem and Hebron in spring, celebrating the festivals of Passover and Shavu'ot. Cairene women participated in this pilgrimage as well.

Because women traveled less freely, more is known about the sacred journeys performed by men, who often left detailed instructions regarding care of their families while absent. One valuable twelfth-century account was the pilgrimage performed by a Spanish rabbi, Benjamin of Tudela (Toledo), who traveled in the 1160s to Palestine as well as to Baghdad and Persia. Like Christian counterparts from Europe en route to the Holy Land, the rabbi visited Jewish communities and sacred places found along the pilgrims' route, discovering Jewish saints, martyrs, and miracles in unlikely places like Rome. In addition, this particular work offers a lesson in historical memory because Benjamin "read" Jerusalem as a Jewish city replete with prophets and matriarchs and not as a site that had been under Muslim rule for more than five centuries or one whose principal monuments recalled Christ and Christianity.

The Spanish rabbi also noted the existence of Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem at a time when the shrine was attracting a transregional following. The mausoleum was situated on the site of a much older structure; a visit to Rachel's resting place was part and parcel of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. By the seventeenth century a local cult was organized in her honor, and Rabbi Moshe Surai's 1650 account notes that both men and women took part in rituals before Rachel's domed shrine: "And many there pray and made petitions and dance around the tomb and eat and drink."¹⁵ Miracles came to be associated with the tomb, and thus from the end of the nineteenth century the site's importance has increased, particularly—as might be expected given the biblical story—for women seeking help with childbearing problems.

Babylonia (under Persian rule in this era) was next on Benjamin's twelfth-century itinerary. Persian Jews performed pilgrimages to tomb-shrines where the prophets were believed buried—Ezekiel in Baghdad and Mordecai and Esther in Hamadan. Located in Hamadan in western Iran is the ebony tomb of Esther, the queen who spared her people from annihilation some 2,400 years ago. The tomb-shrine was a vaulted crypt adorned with Hebrew inside and surrounded by walls outside. It still functions as a pilgrimage center for Persian Jews, who have observed Purim there for centuries, celebrating their identity as both Jews and Persians simultaneously. Benjamin expressed surprise at Ezekiel's tomb in Baghdad because Muslims, who also revered the prophet, paid ritual visits there, and the shrine's guardians were both Jewish and Muslim.

Judaism as lived in North Africa and the Middle East has a rich tradition of saint cults and pilgrimage. Nevertheless, because of the emphasis upon God's unity and transcendence, the veneration of holy persons has caused disquiet in Judaism, as also in Islam. Prophets and patriarchs were regarded as particularly close to God because of their miraculous gifts and uncommon virtue, but they were not believed to exert supernatural powers from the grave. (An exception is a movement in modern Judaism, "Beshtian Hasidism," which recognizes holy men.)

For many diaspora Jews, journeying to Jerusalem was not only dangerous but also difficult due to financial or family circumstances. Local pilgrimages centered on saint veneration provided an alternative sacred space, no matter how much some rabbinical authorities frowned upon or condemned these manifestations of piety. Indeed, saint cults in memory of uncommonly pious rabbis or unusually learned sages have long represented an important expression of African Judaism. Often the tomb-shrine of a holy man—a zaddik—attracted a following that gradually evolved into a constructed system of rituals as well as shared beliefs in his miracle-working abilities (the *hillula*). As late as the twentieth century, Morocco alone boasted some six hundred Jewish saints, mainly rabbis; their shrines have served as the focal points for local or regional pilgrimages until the present. Charting these sacred geographies in the premodern eras also demonstrates that the same saints and spaces were sometimes venerated by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike.

The veneration of holy persons expressed in saint cults constituted a prominent feature of Jewish popular spirituality in the region from Morocco to Persian/Iran. One socially admissible reason for Jewish women to travel was pilgrimage to a local saint's center. Jews regarded the shrine of Dammuh south of Cairo, for example, as sacred space; the number of statutes governing female visitors' behavior indicates how common the practice was. Women unaccompanied by male family members were forbidden to take part in festivals, unless the women were very old. Those neither old nor under male supervision must have visited the shrine spot frequently—otherwise the regulations would have been unnecessary.

Local pilgrimages, shrine visits, or celebrations to honor holy persons were occasions when social barriers loosened, if only temporarily, and, more important, where unregulated sociability between the sexes occurred. Jewish women participated in the collective rites, which is why religious authorities condemned these manifestations of populist piety. With several exceptions, Jewish saints in North Africa and the Middle East have been rabbis, honored for erudition while alive and for miraculous powers after death.

The Jews of the island of Jerba off the coast of southern Tunisia date their arrival there from the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C.E. They represent their community as "the Jerusalem of Africa" because, in this first diaspora, emigrants brought with them the door of the Jerusalem sanctuary. An annual international pilgrimage is still performed in the island's best-known synagogue, the Ghriba ("the Marvelous"), which houses fragments from the first Temple as well as ancient Torah scrolls. In local lore, however, the site where the Ghriba synagogue now stands has been conflated with pious legends about a young female saint and virgin who sailed

to Jerba from Palestine carrying Torah scrolls sometime in the early nineteenth century. Since that time, mass pilgrimages to the Ghriba synagogue have been performed to commemorate the arrival of the female saint from Palestine and honor pious rabbis. In the annals of North African Judaism, the female holy person as cultic figure was unusual, because most Jewish saint cults are male-centered although women participated actively in them. Muslims have also recognized the sacredness of the Ghriba over the centuries.

A final example demonstrates women's tenacity in local shrine visitations, even in the face of male disapproval, as well as the power of popular forms of Judaism. Located in Tripoli in Libya are the tomb-shrines of two close disciples of Shabbetai Zevi (1626–76), the "false messiah." An Ottoman subject born in Izmir, Shabbetai studied Kabbalah and Jewish law with the intent of becoming a rabbi but declared himself the Messiah in 1648. Local tradition had it that after the movement was suppressed, two of Shabbetai's followers emigrated to Tripoli, where they died. Libyan Jews, male and female, honored the memory of the false messiah and his disciples by performing pilgrimages to their tombs as well as keeping candles lit in the ancient synagogue, al-Thalithah, in Tripoli. The local Muslim population also venerated the holy men's shrines. Until the twentieth century, Jewish women not only made offerings of oil for the synagogue's lamps but also sang (in dialectical Arabic) from the "Song of the Book," praising the movement's leaders with "you are the Merciful and Forgiver, send the Messiah together with Nathan."¹⁶

As some North African Jews came into contact with reform movements of European Judaism in the nineteenth century, they denounced saint cults as heterodox, all the more so because illiterate women of ordinary status often were the main participants. During the 1860s, Rabbi Abraham Adadi of Tripoli attempted to end collective veneration of Shabbetai Zevi and his disciples but to no avail. Women in particular persisted in their devotions until well into the next century. When Rabbi Khmus Fallah heard them singing in honor of the false messiah on the eve of World War II, he broke their synagogue candles as a reprimand.

Even ordinary women, however, unlettered and of humble circumstances, did not always obey communal religious leaders when it came to saint cults. As was true in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, Libyan Jewish women, often widows, endowed synagogues. In at least one case a female-endowed synagogue was also named after a woman, although that broke with tradition.

For Jewish communities in exile, pilgrimage to Jerusalem became entwined with a sense of collective banishment tempered by messianic expectations for future redemption. Thus, diaspora Jews practiced pilgrimage to places other than the holy city while preserving a sense of spiritual and emotive continuity with the exemplary center, its Temple, and its mythologized landscape. For the nascent Church, pilgrimage traditions, although heavily influenced by Judaism, followed a somewhat different path, one marked by the spiritual activism of pious women and men as well as the growing imbrication between state or empire and religion.

EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND PILGRIMAGE IN CHRISTIANITY

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE EARLY CHURCH

The lines between the “Jesus movement” or nascent Christianity and Judaism remained blurred until the fifth century, when religiously syncretic communities were still found in parts of Syria and Palestine. From the second century, however, Jewish and Christian authorities began erecting boundaries between their respective traditions and barriers around their followers. As is often true of radical socioreligious movements, “gender roles and expectations were temporarily transcended as women and men worked together to spread the gospel message” beyond the community coalescing around Jesus in the decades immediately after his death.¹⁷ Some of the earliest written sources suggest female leadership, including women who exercised prophecy. Nevertheless, Roman law and customs exerted an enormous impact upon Christianity (as upon Judaism). In part, scholars attribute shifts from the relative gender egalitarianism of early dissident or millenarian Christianity to the later subordination of women to the adoption of household codes inspired partially by pagan Roman models as well as by gradual changes in Church-state relations.

By the end of the first Christian century, bishops and laymen increasingly restricted women’s church roles. Orthodoxy rested upon eliminating female preaching and teaching, an idea found in the contested Deutero-Pauline letters, which also negatively portray woman’s nature. The early third century saw another change reflected in patristic literature—the church hierarchy’s growing concern with the spiritual, social, and physical control of women. Most historical evidence from this and later periods comes from male authors and was largely prescriptive. Nevertheless, “Writings about women often provide glimpses of conflicts between male ecclesiastical leaders and laywomen in Christian churches.”¹⁸

During the last Roman persecutions (from 303 to 311 C.E.), the number of women whose spiritual quest for union with Christ brought public humiliation, torture, and martyrdom was remarkable. Because man was in the image of God, female martyrs and ascetics strove to emulate men. Perpetua of Carthage, author of the earliest Christian text by a woman, was imprisoned and condemned to death; before her execution she dreamed of assuming a male body. The virgin Thecla dressed like a man so as to travel freely without fear of rape, and Pelagia, too, wore men’s clothing to join an all-male monastery. From this period on, “Women of surpassing spiritual achievement had been masculinized, as the female rulers and scholars and fictitious heroines of the Renaissance would be later.”¹⁹

Gender transgressions were disturbing both to early Christians and pagan Roman societies. Martyrs, mystics, and ascetics have always posed problems to religious authorities, females even more so because the renunciation of earthly pleasures constituted an implicit critique of male control. In its earliest stages, the ascetic movement exalted virginity, which complicated the notion of marriage as the Christian ideal for woman. Theological debates over the issue demonstrate the enduring influence of older, pagan Graeco-Roman views of sexuality, particularly of Hellenic asceticism. With the eclipse of martyrdom as the path to salvation, Christians embraced ascetism as a means of redemption, although self-denial was, by its very

nature, highly gendered. Withdrawing from the world, often in communities, ascetics employed veneration of the Eucharist as “a trigger for contemplation and absorption, ever closer to an immersion in God.”²⁰ The Eucharist remained the central devotion until the late medieval period and constituted an important construct for imagining and defining symbolic power for Christian Europe.

The Sacraments render Christianity distinct from both Judaism and Islam. Baptism was a rite for men as well as women. It replaced circumcision, which, as a sign of belonging in Judaism, was fixed upon the male body and masculinity as well as conferring superior identity and status on boys. Moreover, the fact that marriage was a sacrament—rather than a contract as in Judaism and Islam—meant that ending a Christian marriage was difficult if not impossible. In Judaism and Islam, marriage is a commandment for men and women; the celibate life was only possible for those few Jewish scholars who entirely devoted their lives to studying Torah. All three religions prize chaste women and, in varying degrees, silent and submissive women. By joining institutionalized celibacy and some education with the silence of prayer and mystical devotion, however, the monastic movement paradoxically created a sociospiritual space for women.

MONASTICISM

After the 313 edict of toleration and the establishment of Christianity in 391, the era of heroic virgin martyrs more or less ended. Subsequently, aristocratic women acted as patronesses, endowing shrines, building churches, or donating to monasteries. In Europe, Christian women of high rank married to pagan rulers were instrumental in converting barbarian princes. Despite important roles in conversion and patronage, women were restricted to the office of deaconess by around 400—a change attributed to elaboration of an exclusively male, ordained priesthood and widespread acceptance of the notion that female nature was inherently weak and lustful.

The growth of monasticism, first in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean and then in Western Europe, offered new opportunities for women, particularly those of the upper class, to assume leadership of all-female congregations as canonesses and abbesses. The idea of being the brides of Christ, introduced by Tertullian before 200 C.E., evolved into organized communities of virgins and widows dedicated to celibacy, prayer, and good works. In Bethlehem, the Roman pilgrim Paula (347–404) established a monastery with two hundred women under vows. From the Eastern Mediterranean, the system spread into Spain and to southern France and elsewhere.

Perhaps the first convent where manuscripts were copied was in the city of Arles, France, where a large community of virgins was established in 506 by Caesaria, sister of the bishop, Caesarius, who wrote the “Rule of Arles.” This rule was superseded by the Latin Rule of St. Benedict (480?–547?), which rendered monasticism a rural movement less concerned with enclosure and more with missionary activity and manual labor. Functioning as centers of teaching, learning, prayer, and communal social service for surrounding populations, particularly the poor, monasteries multiplied for males and females. As such, they played a powerful role in conversion along the shifting borders between paganism and Christianity in Germany and the British Isles.

During this period, monasticism had fewer gender differences than it did later. Monasteries that had both men and women in close proximity were common. Although theoretically under the authority of an abbot, some monastic establishments were run by abbesses, often of high social birth, who were allowed to hear nonsacramental confessions from the women under their spiritual guidance. During the ninth century, however, Benedictine reformers under imperial patronage—and in the tenth century the abbots of Cluny—sought not only to enclose women more firmly but also to separate them from male communities. At the same time, monks were made superior to sisters through ordination.

The same pattern began to emerge in the historical evolution of Christianity that did in other religions. During the turbulent centuries of invasions in Europe, when the state was weak or decentralized and Christianity represented a rural, frontier missionary faith, women were accorded greater public roles in religious, cultural, and political life. The reemergence of stronger states, urban-based elites, and highly stratified ecclesiastical authorities narrowed women's range of options, imposing more gendered differences upon male and female piety. Nevertheless, high social rank frequently conferred considerable religiosocial authority upon individual women, as did literacy.

In Christianity as in Judaism and Islam, men have monopolized religious knowledge and the interpretation of sacred scriptures until very recently. Yet some women achieved literacy and composed spiritual literature, such as didactic poetry, lessons, and saints' lives. Not surprisingly, most female intellectuals of the period were nuns and tended to be from privileged classes. The tenth-century Saxon canoness Hrotsvitha, for example, wrote dramas in Latin and composed biographies of female saints and martyrs to counter the misogyny of such classical authors as Lucan. Narrating exemplary lives for imitation constituted a critical process in consolidating the Church's social and moral authority; paradoxically, it also gave voice to, and legitimated, female spirituality.

The later Middle Ages (from the twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries) saw a significant increase in female participation in the Church, whether as religious or lay members. Along with a spectacular growth in the number of monasteries or convents and the emergence of reformed orders, new saints and visionaries appeared. Aiming at stricter discipline, the Cistercians arose from a reform movement within the Benedictines. Established in France around 1098, the Cistercian Order played a major part in promoting spiritual activism. By 1150 three hundred Cistercian houses were scattered throughout Western Europe. Simplicity in all its manifestations represented the order's ideal, and that inspired similar orders, especially mendicants such as the Franciscans and Dominicans.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) of western Germany was a member of a reformed Benedictine convent. Placed in a convent when still a child, she experienced visions from an early age but prudently revealed them only after attaining the rank of abbess around the age of forty. She is best known for three books of visions (*Scivias*, *Book of Life's Merit*, and the unfinished *Book of Divine Works*) and also composed, in Latin, an autobiography and liturgical music as well as works on theology and

medicine. Hildegard oversaw the creation of illuminations depicting her visions and devised specifically female spiritual symbols, for example, the egg. Her mystical and prophetic gifts were widely recognized by secular and religious authorities, yet her criticism of Church abuses created conflict with the ecclesiastical establishment, which opposed Hildegard's claims that God spoke directly through her.

Associated with "exaggerated" poverty and mysticism, the Penitential and Third Orders were sometimes accused of heretical leanings, although their appeal to believers of all social ranks may have been as threatening to religious authorities. Popular sociospiritual movements often offer an expanded (if only briefly) space for women who joined these religious houses in droves.

Communities known as Beguines represented a new manifestation of female religiosity in this period; some scholars view them specifically as a women's movement whose impact upon forms of piety was enormous. Taking vows of poverty, chastity, prayer, and service, Beguines did not adhere to formally organized, church-approved orders, which made them suspect. Found mainly in urban areas in northern Italy, France, Germany, and the low countries, the Beguines included solitary seekers of spiritual perfection as well as small groups that resided together; still others, such as the Grand Beguinage of Paris, collected hundreds of women for communal spiritual life.

The movement produced a number of prominent visionaries, such as Marie d'Oignies (who died in 1211) and Mechtilde of Magdeburg (who died around 1290), and also posed the problem of "women without men" not under direct male protection or supervision. The Beguines' lack of institutionalization, their "more informal arrangement for giving religious significance to ordinary life seemed odd and dangerous to male sensibilities."²¹ One solitary itinerant Beguine, Marguerite Porete, was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1310 because she disobeyed the bishop of Cambrai's injunction against women teaching in public and preaching, inspired by her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. The year following her execution Church hierarchy launched an attack against the Beguine movement.

These centuries constituted a golden age of female mysticism and mystics, whose enthusiastic spirituality sometimes troubled male clerics or society at large. Frequently ecstatic experiences centered around Christ as Man, encountered as the divine lover—"bridal mysticism"—or the suffering redeemer on the cross.

As the Church made the Eucharist its central sacrament, identification with the suffering Christ grew since the twelfth century into a popular form of devotion in which women played a major role. Through eucharistic devotions, a believer could become one with the body of Christ, regardless of gender; female images and representations of relationships with Christ as human are explicitly physical. Loving union with Christ remained the spiritual goal of mystics for centuries. Indeed, female visionaries and mystics, often blessed with miraculous powers, have appeared during the modern and contemporary eras in Christian communities worldwide. It should be kept in mind, however, that "the received view of women as weaker and less rational than men paradoxically functioned both to certify the authority of women mystics and to impugn it."²²

Women of uncommon piety, and their lives and spiritual journeys, provided inspiration for other female visionaries. Hildegard was a model for many pious women in the Rhineland, and Bridget (or Birgitta) of Sweden (who died in 1373) and Elisabeth of Hungary (who died in 1165) were exemplars for the fifteenth-century English visionary Margery Kempe. Kempe (c. 1373–c. 1440), a noblewoman from Norfolk, bore some fourteen children before taking a vow of chastity in 1413. Matrimony and motherhood prevented intense devotional lives. Beset by visions after the birth of her first child, it was only later that Kempe realized her spiritual quest and experienced Christ in mystical encounters as the bridegroom whom she loved passionately and whose sufferings she shared. She came to Church attention not only due to her religious experiences but also because she openly condemned the hypocrisy, lewdness, and unchaste lives of some clergy. Although she was exonerated of charges of heresy, the archbishop of York rebuked Kempe for violating Paul's interdiction against female preaching.

Kempe's exposure of vice among male clerics, as well as Christine de Pizan's (c. 1364–c. 1430) spirited defense of the female sex, provides evidence that some women during the late medieval period contested the prevailing religious and social order. Indeed, Kempe's vision of an alternative Christian social order suggested that she regarded prevailing gender norms as constraining women's true spiritual life. The list of ecstatic women whose extraordinary encounters with the divine were committed to writing is a long one indeed. Yet class or social rank need to be taken into account. Had Hildegard, the "prophetess of the Rhineland," been of common origins—or worse, had she lost the support of those in power—she might have been condemned as a witch or heretic, the fate of the virgin visionary and military leader Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake in 1431.²³

EXEMPLARY WOMEN

Christian scripture is ambiguous about woman's nature and thus on her proper role in religion. Modern interpretations of the New Testament have sparked debates not only on female leadership in the early Church but also the dating, authorship, and authenticity of some sources. The Deutero-Pauline letters (e.g., Colossians or Ephesians) paint an especially negative view of female nature as inherently impure. Essentially weak and given to sin and base desire, women are therefore incapable of learning. In consequence, the ideal woman was silent as well as subordinate. The wife's surrender to her husband symbolized the church's submission to Christ. Chaste, modest, and fertile, the exemplary woman could only achieve sanctity through child-bearing and motherhood as well as obedience to husband or other males. Noncanonical writings, mainly the Apocrypha, as well as canonical writings, such as some of Paul's uncontested letters, have been interpreted in ways that partially offset these negative images and offer women limited spiritual authority. From some books of the Apocrypha and canonical sources come the legends and lore informing the cult of the Virgin Mary, female symbol of goodness and benevolent power.

Although many women saints are remembered either as virgins or mothers, Mary claimed special status because she alone was both virgin and mother of God. The cult in her honor developed over centuries from popular veneration as well as pre-Christian beliefs. Some scholars detect earlier pagan practices in the emergence of Marian piety. Imperial concerns also shaped the Virgin's cult. For example, the notion of "Mary Mother of God" (Theotokos) was encouraged by the Empress Augusta Pulcheria (399–453) to buttress her own power. From about 1150 on, veneration of the Virgin as Jesus' human mother "exploded in new forms of prayer, scriptural exegesis, song, art, pilgrimage, drama, church dedication, and social organization."²⁴

In medieval Christian piety, Mary earned the exalted title of "Our Lady," which placed her on the same spiritual plane as Jesus Lord, although she is revered as a powerful intercessor rather than a ruler. Her cult was not static but evolved over time in response to social, cultural, and other changes; moreover, significant regional variations existed. In Mediterranean and southern European Christianity, imitation of the Virgin for both men and women was the norm. During the thirteenth century the emphasis on Mary and motherhood shifted in Italy toward a new focus upon Jesus as infant and child, mirroring perhaps larger transformations in attitudes toward childhood and the family.

Devotions to the Virgin Mary were highly developed in pre-Reformation Christianity and now exist primarily in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other Eastern Rite Churches in the Middle East. Her cult has always attracted men as well as women because Mary has been seen as the exemplary Christian although the reception of the Marian ideal, as well as participation in the Virgin's cult, has displayed gender differences. In modern time, Marian apparitions worldwide have frequently been claimed by young women or girls. Until very recently among the Melkite Christian communities of northern Syria, the composition of poetry in honor of the Virgin was largely a male activity. Finally, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also revered in Islam.

Older scholarship on female religiosity during the Middle Ages propounded the "virgin-whore" polarity. More recent research, however, has shown that although these extremes existed, literary and legal sources offered a more subtle view of women, real and imagined. Mary Magdalen, the patron saint of repentant fallen women, is a case in point. Indeed, after the Virgin, Mary Magdalen was the most popular female saint during the Middle Ages. Now, scholarship argues that the Magdalen's biography was constructed over the centuries from possibly three different women mentioned in the Gospels. Moreover, feminist biblical exegesis posits that the historical Mary Magdalen was an active preacher and spiritual associate of Christ, the "apostle of the apostles," and that historical memory of her as a prostitute was a later clerical invention. Venerated by women and men in the early and medieval church, she became the focal point of penitential practices because, as the paradigmatic sinner, Mary Magdalen offered hope of salvation to all. Devotions to her gave rise to a genre of literature—narratives of converted prostitutes. The tale of the redeemed harlot was a favorite trope in Byzantine hagiography, legends, and sermons. Despite the complexity of the legends and devotions surrounding the reformed prostitute, "The harlot in the extremity of her

chastisement bore the full weight of the abhorrence of sexuality that the church focused upon women.”²⁵ Historically, devotions to Mary, heroic virgins, pious visionaries, or bad but repentant women were part of the impetus for organized saint veneration, including pilgrimage.

Even as exemplars, holy persons or saints represented gendered socioreligious constructs. Saintry vocations for male and female followed different “career paths,” mirroring distinct social opportunities and constraints. Women were assigned a more passive, interior role, whereas men were portrayed as actively engaging in the world. It must always be kept in mind, however, that the most vitae for holy persons were written by men, following hagiographical conventions. The double standard for aspiring holy women was unmistakable: “The virtuous girl might demonstrate her virtue either by heroically insisting on chastity (and thereby rebelling against her family) or by obediently marrying at her parent’s command (and thereby retreating from what the church argued to be a higher good).”²⁶

Variations in eucharistic devotions, miracles, and ascetic or meditation practices suggest differences between male and female piety as portrayed in the lives of saints. Historical circumstance combined with social class frequently determined whether a woman was accused of being a heretic or a sorceress or, conversely, whether she was regarded as uncommonly virtuous and thus worthy of emulation. Inquisition handbooks such as the *Malleus maleficarum*, issued in 1486 by two Dominican inquisitors, Krämer and Sprenger, defined “demonic” female behavior to detect and punish witches, most of them from the lowest social orders. Saint Catherine’s (1347–80) visions, for example, were first seen as demonic influences. Yet being of high rank meant that she was exonerated and eventually venerated for special piety. Indeed, as Caroline Bynum has argued, by 1500 the model of a female saint, both in popular belief and Church doctrine, was a mirror image of a witch.

SACRED JOURNEYS: PILGRIMAGES AND SAINT CULTS

With a zeal and courage unbelievable in a woman she forgot her sex and her physical weakness, and longed to make there, amongst those thousands of monks, a dwelling for herself [from St. Jerome’s account of Paula’s travels to the holy places].²⁷

In contrast to the duty for pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslim faithful, Christianity does not require this act, although the example of Jewish devotions at the prophets’ tombs played a formative role in pilgrimage traditions in Christianity and later Islam. Only after Constantine’s victory of 324 C.E. did public pilgrimage to Jerusalem become feasible for Christians. Still, some theologians and Church fathers opposed the practice because Jesus Christ had made statements that seemingly discouraged it. That changed when Constantine’s mother, Helena, undertook a journey through the holy places. Her discovery of the remains of the true cross and the construction of majestic basilicas in Bethlehem and Jerusalem provided inspiration for future pilgrims and pilgrimages. “Helena’s trip was to have fundamental consequences for the history of Holy Land pilgrimage . . . and became the model for many.”²⁸ It also generated new religio-literary genres as well as a praxis whereby the pious imitated the life of Christ through various kinds of sacred journeys, both physical and interior.

Generally, Christian women of high social rank narrated or inspired pilgrimage accounts. In 385 the Roman noblewoman Paula traveled to Jerusalem with her daughter, eventually becoming a model for pilgrims, male and female, to the city. As late as the nineteenth century, English Protestant pilgrims to Jerusalem consulted her account. Yet we only know about Paula through the intervention of a male author. She was accompanied by St. Jerome, who subsequently composed the narrative and thus her spiritual experiences in the exemplary center were refracted through the prism of his words. The first autobiography of a sacred journey was composed in the 380s by Egeria, who was either from Gaul or Galicia in Spain. Apparently well educated (she knew scripture by heart), Egeria journeyed to Jerusalem, spending three years there. Her invaluable account provides details on gender differences and how worship services, rituals, and liturgies were performed in the fourth century.

Paula's and Egeria's examples helped render the act of sacred travel an ideal of piety and holiness. Egeria was later made a saint because of her sacred voyage. Her firsthand account of the "labours of pilgrimage" inspired other sojourners to journey to the Holy Land; to other centers such as Rome that served as symbolic alternatives; or to undertake an interior, life long pilgrimage of the soul, a pilgrim's progress. Whether spiritual travels constituted actual physical displacements or internal spiritual states, pilgrimage became integral to a holy person's biography and a fundamental element in hagiography, mainly composed by men living in monastic orders. Some Church authorities, however, continued to believe that actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem might result paradoxically in "moral mischief," a fear focused upon women, who in their travels might engage in sexual impropriety with the males accompanying them.

Pilgrimage might afford a credible reason for disobeying family patriarchs in matters of life choices. The aristocratic sixth-century Syncretica of Constantinople, for example, avoided an undesirable marriage by persuading her father to grant permission for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, more and more laywomen traveled to the Holy Land to perform penitential acts, visiting other pilgrimages cities like Compostela on their way East. Margery Kempe made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the early 1400s. The narrative she later dictated to a priest is regarded as the first autobiography in English and the second book written by a woman in that language. Although women had composed accounts of either real pilgrimages performed or interior spiritual travels for centuries, these were generally penned by celibates who lived in orders. Kempe was different because of her status as wife, mother, and layperson. Moreover, for her journey, she donned male garb, a not unusual act because women of the period often dressed as men when performing pilgrimages to distant lands.

During the first Christian millennium, pilgrimage centers within Europe were mainly focused upon saint veneration. Marian piety grew rapidly during the eleventh century, resulting in new cult centers dedicated to the Virgin that translated local or regional differences in religiosity. In medieval Germany, for example, Marian shrine devotions tended to emphasize the *pietà*, the suffering mother of Christ. Major centers boasted relics, images, exuberant iconography, and votive gifts. Minor shrines were

often embellished by rural artisans, who drew upon rich folk art traditions in which ordinary women and men participated fully. Women's shrine offerings were invariably the products of the household economy—food, clothing, and handicrafts expressing the domestic sphere in the public realm.

For women in particular, local pilgrimage and the liminal state it entailed offered respite, a legitimate opportunity to travel if only a short distance. It also reaffirmed their spiritual agency and religious identity. And although the Reformation transformed Europe's saint maps as well as the topography of sacred journeys, it could not entirely suppress pilgrimage, even in predominantly Protestant regions. Western Europe now boasts six thousand active shrines dedicated to various kinds of pilgrimage in honor of the saints or the Virgin, and they attract nearly one hundred million annual visitations.

EXEMPLARY WOMEN AND PILGRIMAGE IN ISLAM

Striking parallels can be detected between early Christianity, when women enjoyed spiritual authority and held religious offices, and the nascent faith community in Mecca coalescing around the Prophet Muhammad after 610 C.E. in which women participated fully. In terms of class and gender, early Christianity was relatively egalitarian—both cause and consequence of the fact that private dwellings served as churches. Paul's first church in Antioch, for example, was in a house in the city's Jewish quarter. In Islam the first mosque was in the Muhammad's modest residence in Medina, where male and female followers worshipped.

Intense persecution of the followers of Jesus and Muhammad, both male and female, also emphasized horizontal bonds of solidarity rather than vertical, stratified relationships. Finally, women in both cases were increasingly marginalized as the two socioreligious movements crystalized into highly institutionalized systems of dogma and praxis implicated in states or empires (which always have a huge stake in patriarchy). This section focuses, for the most part, upon the Near or Middle East and North Africa because core gender values of later Muslim societies situated outside the region were often adopted from this cultural matrix or validated by reference to the birthplace of Islam. Nevertheless, generalizations about women and gender in Islam historically are perilous for the same reasons they are for Judaism or Christianity.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: ISLAMIC CONQUESTS, STATES, AND CONVERSION

The spread of Islam across Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe from the seventh century onward produced an enormous range of cultural compromises with preexisting beliefs, institutions, and social organization. Muhammad and his followers explicitly linked Islam to both Judaism and Christianity while claiming to correct their doctrinal errors and thus supersede them. Due to early similarities, Church fathers initially interpreted Islam as yet another Christian heresy after Muslim forces moved from Arabia to the Byzantine-controlled lands of Syria and Egypt in 633 C.E.

With these conquests and the construction of states from remnants of the Persian and Roman Empires, older Arabian gender norms combined with Graeco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, Zoroastrian, and Indo-Persian (to name but a few) gender practices and ideologies. In addition to military conquests stretching to Iberia, France, and India by 732, Islam was also introduced by missionaries, sufi orders, and merchants working the trans-Saharan or Asian trades. Large-scale population displacements and migrations across Eurasia also resulted in conversions. The movement of originally shamanist Turco-Mongolian people westward during the tenth century into Persia and, subsequently, Byzantine and some Arab lands not only brought mobile pastoral societies into contact with established Muslim and Christian societies but also introduced other gender customs. The greater freedom of movement permitted to Turkic or Kipchak women, as well as the public power wielded by Mongol princesses even after conversion to Islam, shocked prudish urbanites such as the fourteenth-century Moroccan scholar Ibn Battuta as he traveled through Anatolia and across the Steppes.

In Central Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, introduced to Islam later than the Middle East and Mediterranean world, Islamic and pre-Islamic indigenous belief systems continuously interacted, which in turn shaped women's situations. Conversion was frequently accomplished in phases, with some elements of Islamic culture—purity and pollution taboos, for example—initially being accepted. Later conversion introduced considerable sociolegal changes such as the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal succession, although not always and everywhere. Old Nubia, on the Nile between Egypt and Ethiopia, had ancient traditions of female public authority that were not erased after Islam's acceptance, and a marked preference for matrilineal inheritance and succession remained despite Quranic and legal injunctions to the contrary.

Bureaucratic states, cities, and highly stratified social hierarchies are often associated with increasing restrictions upon women in the religious and/or public spheres. Veiling, seclusion, and polygamous households (or harems) were practiced in the Middle East before Islam's advent. These practices may have been gradually adopted by Muslim elites after the Umayyad Caliph Walid (who ruled from 705 to 715) secluded royal women within palace confines and took numerous concubines in addition to four legal wives. The Abbasids (750–1258), whose elaborate courts and palaces were relocated to former Sassanian lands in Iraq, imitated Persian ancient statecraft and generalized seclusion and veiling among the upper classes. The Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (754–75), for example, commanded that bridges over the Euphrates near Baghdad be sexually segregated, and a separate bridge for women was constructed.

Yet implementation of gender segregation varied widely over time and space. In medieval Egyptian cities, women “went out in the streets and mingled with men at various celebrations and public prayers, as well as for visits to cemeteries and holy tombs, where they would sometimes spend the entire night.”²⁹ Constant condemnations of sexual mixing by moralists confirm that the practice existed. Although seclusion represented a powerful norm legitimated by appeals to religion, particularly for certain classes of urban women, it was, in reality, subject to

limitations. Thus, as in Judaism and Christianity, Islamic laws, beliefs, and practices governing gender relations have varied greatly in time and place and also in accordance with social rank, age, ethnicity, or race.

QUR'AN, LAW, CUSTOM, AND GENDER

Both Judaism and Islam place heavy emphasis on sacred law in ordering human societies. Most studies of Muslim women evoke female status as defined in the Qur'an and sharia. The Qur'an consecrates an entire chapter to women, containing regulations for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and ritual purity. Interpretations of Quranic passages, however, differed according to the various legal schools emerging during the first two centuries. Varying interpretations of female inheritance and property rights were espoused by the main law schools; for example, temporary marriage was permitted by some jurists, particularly Shi'ite, but not by others. The extensive Hadith literature that supplements the Qur'an was fundamental to Islamic law and represents an important source for ideal gender roles and conduct.

In many places, however, customary law held sway and was applied in conjunction with, or instead of, sharia. When the two systems conflicted, customary law might take precedence over the opinions of Muslim jurists. Customary law for North African Berbers, for example, had always determined female inheritance; the same was true for some pastoral groups in Iran and Afghanistan. Local systems of patriarchy, customs, and political economies often shaped gender relations as much, or more so, than Islamic law, although Muslim societies have always sought legitimacy for these practices by appeals to sacred texts.

Islam imposed virtually identical religious duties upon women and men. Observance of the five pillars—profession of faith, fasting, pilgrimage, alms, and ritual prayer—was incumbent upon all women and offered hope of salvation. But different culturally constructed behaviors were expected of male and female resulting in distinct sociophysical realms. The most visible expression of this was the segregation of male and female spaces, a direct product of the high sociomoral value placed upon female modesty and chastity.

Sexual segregation meant that women fulfilled some religious duties differently from men. They were, for example, required to perform prayers, but household and family duties often interfered. Moreover, women were either barred from communal services at congregational mosques, performing prayers at home, or participated in specially designated areas away from male worshipers in a manner reminiscent of Judaism. They did appear in religious courts, however, either as litigants or informal legal agents for other women. Sexual spatial segregation was more common in urban areas than in the countryside or among pastoral nomadic societies. Indeed, the morphology of Middle Eastern cities and towns was partially determined by the social demand for family and female privacy.

Menstruation taboos, found in most religions, have limited women's participation in formal religious observances and daily life. For Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Eve's sin was embodied in menstruation and ritual impurity. Patristic Christian thinkers such as Augustine supported Levitical prohibitions surrounding menstruation. In medieval Christian Europe, the food asceticism

practiced by fasting females was invariably accompanied by reported cessation of menses, a sign of purity and thus holiness. In Islam, a menstruating woman is unclean; sexual relations are forbidden, as well as fasting, prayer, entering a mosque, touching the Qur'an, or involvement in religious rituals. Women can not resume prayer, even at home, until after the cessation of menses and a ritual bath. *Tahara* (ritual purity) obligations thus have prevented Muslim women from fulfilling religious obligations in the same way that men do. Menstruation prohibitions were not in force, however, during the hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca; nor were alms-giving or other charitable acts subject to menstruation taboos.

As in other religions, women's mental and moral deficiencies have been directly linked to the impurities of menstruation and other reproductive functions. Muslim jurists have invoked them over the centuries to justify the fact that a woman's testimony in court is only worth half a man's, to impose male guardians upon women for decision-making affecting their lives, and to ban Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims because they were assumed incapable of raising children properly in their faith. The connection between ritual impurity and exclusion from devotional activities as well as leadership positions remains largely unquestioned among Muslims even now. Many Eastern Christian Churches—Armenians, Assyrians, and Greek Orthodox—held identical views regarding impurity and imposed similar prohibitions upon women. Even now, menstruating women are forbidden from touching icons in Greek Orthodox churches.

Religious authority in Islam was an exclusively male preserve. Although ordained clergy did not exist, the leaders of communal prayer, the personnel of law courts, and the personnel of other religio-legal institutions could only be men. Expanded literacy was an important consequence of Islam's introduction to some parts of Africa and Asia due to the establishment of mosques, courts, and schools employing Arabic. Religious learning was an exclusively male activity, although educating elite women at home was common. Excluded from the formal spaces of learning such as mosque-schools or universities, a few women nevertheless attained remarkable levels of erudition. Umm Hani (1376–1466), from a Cairene family of notables, studied law and the Hadith in Egypt and Mecca under her grandfather's supervision and personally instructed some of the greatest Hadith scholars of her day. Umm Hani not only achieved a remarkable level of erudition but also performed the hajj thirteen times in her life, married twice, and produced seven named children. Here a pattern emerges that recalls the prominent Jewish women mentioned earlier such as Dulce and Urania of Worms, who hailed from rabbinical families and had been educated at home.

In all religions based upon sacred scriptures, the importance of female erudition is not whether a few women were schooled in those texts but rather whether female-authored works were considered worthy of interest. Hadith scholarship offered a commodious space for learned Muslim females such as Umm Hani in specific historical periods, but the general view of women as weak-willed and mentally incompetent held sway. According to numerous proverbs, woman was synonymous with ignorance: "the 'women's book' (i.e., the corpus of female superstitions) was loaded on a camel, but it was not able to carry the burden."³⁰ At times, medieval

moralists opposed instructing women in all but rudimentary knowledge of their faith. In the Mamluk period (c. 1250–1516 B.C.E.), a tradition attributed to the Prophet was manipulated to inveigh against female instruction: “A woman who learns [how to] write is like a snake given poison to drink.”³¹ Similar attitudes were found in both Christianity and Judaism at the official and popular levels.

There are no sacraments in Islam. As in Judaism, marriage is a contract and thus easier to abrogate, particularly for men. Polyandry and temporary marriage were practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia, but in the time of the Prophet polyandry was banned. Temporary marriage, often practiced in pilgrimage or trading cities attracting men without womenfolk, was continued but regulated by law. Under Islam the practice of polygamy expanded, although with legal restraints. Generally, only elites could afford more than one spouse; the incidence of multiple wives appears to have been less pervasive than previously thought. Ordinary people—the bulk of the population—tended toward monogamy. Some groups, such as the Berbers, looked with disfavor upon polygamy, probably due to local resource structures combined with customary inheritance law. And because divorce was common and much easier for men, the recourse to polygamy was not needed—serial marriages replaced concurrent multiple wives. Some Jewish communities under Islamic states practiced limited polygamy in certain regions and periods.

Another direct parallel with Judaism is that Islam discourages celibacy, because the greatest duty of believers is to produce progeny, above all, males. At times pious Muslims embraced sexual renunciation to better serve God. However, the reasons impelling Christian ascetics such as Augustine and Muslim ascetics such as the Persian scholar al-Ghazali (who died in 1111) to become celibates were informed by similarly negative views of female nature: “to isolate themselves from women, whose sexuality was viewed as possessing a dangerous power that seduces, an impurity that pollutes, or a physical quality that weakens the will and spirit.”³²

The early Christian notion of marriage as a school for sexual continence—and all the more so the idea of celibacy within marriage—was foreign to Islam because both men and women (theoretically) have the right to sexual fulfillment within marriage. Organized monasticism, with convents and monasteries enclosing men and women in vows of celibacy, did not exist in Islam. Muslim moralists rejected monasticism itself, mainly on the basis of Hadiths condemning the practice as well as prophetic example.

In contrast to Christianity, Muslim women did not have recourse to convents or other forms of religious associational life that offered acceptable alternatives to marriage and, for some women at least, an education. Although infrequent, individual Muslim women embraced celibacy as an empowering spirituality. The foremost example was the ascetic Rabi’a of Basra (who died in 801[?]), who adopted the celibate life to achieve union with God.

From roughly the twelfth century onward, organized sufi or mystical establishments for Muslim men grew, probably first in Persia. Membership in a sufi order did not imply sexual renunciation. Many shaykhs or leaders of these establishments were married, often having multiple wives. Some sufi orders accepted women members, but that did not normally result in an associational or communal

life independent of marriage, family, or household. Finally, unlike Judaism in diaspora, where the home represented an important site for religious observances, celebrations, and festivals, the domestic unit or household in Islam was not invested with any special religious significance, although the home was where most women performed their daily prayers. The nondomestic spaces deemed appropriate for women regardless of social circumstance were mosques, when equipped with separate sections for prayer; public baths; cemeteries on Fridays; and, depending upon location, saints' shrines.

One principal point made throughout this essay is that social rank and gender have historically intersected in different ways to shape women's participation in, or exclusion from, religious institutions. Islamic philanthropy represented a critical element not only in the construction of exemplary females but also for women in general, because charity constituted a moral and legal obligation not limited by menstruation taboos. Predictably, we know more about elite and urban philanthropic activities.

In the early Abbasid era, Queen Khayzuran (who died in 789) transformed one of Muhammad's dwellings in Mecca into a glorious mosque. Another queen, Zubayda (who died in 831), had an aqueduct constructed to furnish Mecca with pure water. The significant part that women played in establishing religious endowments (*waqfs*) is well documented for medieval Egypt and Syria, where wives of princes or governors alienated revenue-producing enterprises—bathhouses, mills, factories, oil presses, and stores—for communal religious purposes. Endowed hospitals, mosques, theological colleges (*madrāsas*), or fountains often bore female patrons' names.

High social rank offered some women more visible venues for undertaking pious works in the public sector, and other factors, too, played a role—particularly age and generation. Older women, particularly those with sons, wielded enormous authority; female matriarchies and hierarchies that had their own patronage systems greatly shaped religious philanthropy and social charity.

During the sixteenth century elite status combined with the politics of reproduction within royal Ottoman households resulted in women's active involvement in imperial affairs and, indirectly, in the religious sphere of jihad. The Ottoman ulema castigated the "sultanate of women," blaming political decline with respect to Christian Europe on the fact that women had intervened in politics. In 1599 the Ottoman mufti publicly condemned royal women, citing a well-known prophetic hadith: "A people who entrusts its affairs to a woman will never know prosperity."³³ Offered as counter-models were pious, chaste, and submissive females, such as Khadija and Fatima, related to the Prophet. Perhaps the Ottoman ulema also recalled with trepidation 'A'isha, the Prophet's third wife, whose meddling in religion and politics rendered her a problematic example for ordinary women.

EXEMPLARY WOMEN

From the early Islamic era, the women associated with the Prophet, his family, and followers were subjects of extensive hagiographical literature, one of whose major sources was the biographical dictionary, a genre more or less unique to Islam. Composed from the ninth century on, these dictionaries contained the life stories of pious Muslims. Ibn Sa'd's tenth-century *Book of Classes* is one of the earliest surviving works.

Because scholars like Ibn Sa'd drew on oral traditions handed down from Muhammad's time, the compilations contain material about virtuous men and women from the first generation of Muslims. Indeed, the vast majority of female exemplars flourished during Muhammad's lifetime, and some pre-dated Islam. The Qur'an does not name Abraham's legal wife or his consort, but oral traditions, later collected into the Hadith, celebrated Hagar. When she and her son Isma'il (Ishmael) were banished to unforgiving wastelands near Mecca, Hagar saved her son's life. The event is ritually commemorated during the annual hajj, when pilgrims frantically search for water in the desert.

Muslims also revere Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is cited in the Qur'an, although Fatima (who died in 633), the Prophet's daughter and only surviving child, is not mentioned. Fatima was the wife of 'Ali, the fourth Caliph or successor to Muhammad. Over the ages she has been exalted as a pious, submissive daughter and mother of two imams in Shi'ism. The Shi'a conferred upon Fatima attributes similar to Mary, for example, as the suffering mother. If the holy family was a focal point of Christian devotion, Shi'ites venerated the holy family of Muhammad, Fatima, and 'Ali. "Fatima is the Mother-Creator figure, not very different from the image of Mary in Roman Catholicism, she is even referred to as 'virgin' (*batul*)."³⁴ In popular Shi'ite lore, Fatima was represented as devoid of sexuality; at times she was portrayed as not subject to menstruation and thus perpetually fulfilling obligations of fasting and prayer. In Shi'ite communities, the cult surrounding the "mistress of the women of the worlds" held the belief that Fatima wielded miraculous powers and even infallibility, something reserved for the Prophet and imams. With time Fatima embodied perfect womanhood and the ideal mother blessed with patience, passivity, long-suffering devotion, and selflessness. Over the centuries, women have sought Fatima's intercession for problems of conception, childbirth, illness, and marital woes.

More ambiguous was 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr (who died in 678), revered by Sunni Muslims as Muhammad's favorite spouse and a learned woman. Yet 'A'isha drew criticism because of her bold, untoward actions as a widow. In Shi'i tradition, she took part in the evil plot to deny to Muhammad's cousin, 'Ali, the office of caliph, and thus Shi'ite sources tended to vilify her. Classical Islamic literature, however, differed on 'A'isha's role in the Battle of the Camel (656), where she participated in bitter struggles over succession to the caliphate. Nevertheless, women active in political affairs were compared to 'A'isha with negative connotations. As was true of Mary Magdalen, 'A'isha's story was reinterpreted over time. In the later Middle Ages she was "rehabilitated" by Sunni writers due to her religious knowledge and importance in Hadith transmission, eventually becoming the "Mother of Believers."

With the spread of the printing press and print culture in the nineteenth century, the lives of the pious women associated with the Prophet were circulated more widely in editions resembling lives of the Christian saints and recited at women's religious gatherings.

As in other traditions, Muslim scholars regarded women in authority as an "unnatural state of affairs." Chastity, modesty, and submissiveness constituted highly prized behavioral characteristics; moralists such as al-Ghazali legitimized that by appeal to the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Prophet's women. As paragons of virtue, women became guardians of family honor. Female public and private comportment brought either collective humiliation or dignity to the lineage. Fathers, sons, and particularly brothers ensured that womenfolk did not violate honor codes. In tempting men and leading them astray, women wielded powers commensurate with those of Satan; they were represented as inherently lustful, sexually irresponsible, and dangerous. Regarded as a source of disorder and chaos (*fitna*) due to their mental and moral deficiencies, women required not only constant male supervision but also concealment. These views of female nature closely resembled those of Christian clerics and Jewish rabbis during the same period. Ideologies of sexual honor and shame have existed in most societies to various degrees and were directly related to notions of sexual purity, reproduction, lineage, and, ultimately, patriarchy.

Profane literature, composed for male elites, also portrayed women as sexually insatiable. The best-known examples are in the *Arabian Nights*, where wives sexually betray husbands and cause misfortune to all around them. Destructive female lust structures the tales' narratives, which offer portraits of the "bad woman" as opposed to the "good chaste wife." In addition, medieval Muslim scholars produced an enormous corpus of prescriptive works—marriage manuals, instruction books for rulers, and treatises on health—containing gendered moral messages. Al-Ghazali's advice manual for kings opined that "a woman's piety and seclusion are favors from God" and urged readers to avoid contacts, physical or even aural, between unrelated men and women.³⁵ Censuring the moral laxity of Cairo's women, Ibn al-Hajj repeated a well-known Hadith: "A woman is permitted three exits: one to the house of the husband when she is married to him; one when her parents die; and one when she is carried to her grave."³⁶ Ibn al-Hajj drew from a larger ideology of sexuality interpreting the female body as dangerous to the "order of the male world."³⁷

Female and feminine signified corruption because women, ignorant of religious knowledge, believed in vile superstitions due to innate physical and mental deficiencies. Social class also undergirded moral treatises because the popular socioreligious practices of ordinary men and women were frequently condemned as un-Islamic and as provoking anarchy and natural calamity.

PILGRIMAGE AND SACRED JOURNEYS

The Muslim ideal in human behavior was patterned upon the "perfect human," the Prophet Muhammad, who unlike Christ never claimed divine attributes, although later followers associated him with supernatural events and quasi-divine status. Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets," was regarded as the supreme guide for all

men and women, the sure path or right way to salvation. Throughout the ages, pious Muslims have imitated the Prophet's way (or *sunna*), including norms governing gender. Female veneration of Muhammad did not approach the ecstatic forms of women's devotion to Christ as expressed in bridal mysticism during the medieval Christian era. Some Muslim mystics, such as Rabi'a, employed similarly ecstatic discourse in their mystical poetry, but it was often directed primarily at God as the ultimate lover and less to his prophet.

Muhammad's life has been recreated during the pilgrimage to Mecca, which ritually celebrated sociospiritual and political events in a way somewhat reminiscent of the stations of the cross for Christians. Pre-Islamic figures such as Hagar or Abraham were also commemorated, but Muhammad's biography provided the fundamental structural narrative for the pilgrimage. Pilgrims frequently visited tombs associated with Muhammad's family; mausoleums in Medina contain the remains of daughters, wives, paternal aunts, and even his wet-nurse, Halima. Significantly, during the hajj, some gender prescriptions were lifted, for example, women were not required to veil their faces. The "Great Pilgrimage" has been performed for more than 1300 years and represents a central event not only for Muslims but also for world history. Its annual occurrence brought large numbers of diverse people from the Afro-Eurasian ecumene together for worship as well as trade and other exchanges.

Unlike Judaism, both Christianity and Islam are imbued with strong missionary imperatives. Performing the annual pilgrimage to Mecca sometimes entailed crossing tremendous expanses of territory, resulting in conversions to Islam because pilgrims proselytized along their journey. As in Christianity, the act of pilgrimage became a paradigm for piety and thus a standard feature in the lives of Muslim holy persons. And as in both Judaism and Christianity, the hajj maps out revelation and scripture topographically onto a sacred landscape. Shi'i Muslims also performed the hajj to the Holy Cities, although they held other spaces as sacred, especially the pilgrimage cities of Karbala and Najaf, which house the tombs of the imams.

One of the five pillars, pilgrimage is incumbent upon women if their social condition permits. For reasons of safety and moral probity, Muslim women traveled less frequently than men. As was true for Christian or Jewish women on long-distance pilgrimage, Muslim women had to be escorted by male family members. Umm Hani may have performed the hajj thirteen times, but she did so with male relatives and was greatly assisted by family wealth. Pilgrimage accounts by women comparable to those of Paula or Egeria do not exist, although pilgrims' instruction manuals were produced. The earliest known female-authored work was written by a Mughal princess, Gulbadan Begum, who made the hajj from India in the sixteenth century. Her account does not provide detailed information, however, perhaps because it was deemed impious to reveal too much about the most sacred of journeys. Contemporary Muslim women have written accounts, yet there is little historical evidence about how Muslim women in the pre-modern period experienced the hajj—a journey to the exemplary center.

Nevertheless, completing the hajj meant that a woman's social status changed; as for a man, she added the honorific *hajja* to her name. Women unable to travel compensated through philanthropy facilitating others' journeys to Mecca. In addition to the great pilgrimage, women and men visited saints' shrines, participated in annual celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, or in urban public rituals such as those in Cairo when the hajj caravan departed for the holy cities in Arabia, Mecca, and Medina. Local pilgrimages involved more women more fully in collective rites and rituals, but those manifestations of religiosity tended to be less well documented.

As in Judaism and Christianity, Muslim women's daily religiosity found fullest expression in "popular" rites, rituals, observances, and festivals preserved chiefly but not exclusively in oral traditions. Much of what we know about ordinary people and their past religious practices comes from those charged with suppressing them. The most visible embodiment of these beliefs was the saint's shrine or sufi center located in the village, urban quarter, or some remote corner of desert or mountain. Indeed, the religious topography of the Middle East and Africa was deeply marked by saints and their shrines and the broader social networks based upon them. Often excluded from the mosque, women's communal spiritual life was institutionalized by intense involvement in saint veneration and/or sufism. As in Christianity, there were fewer holy women than men, although both men and women venerated powerful female saints. Within saint cults and sufism, women constructed their own sacred spaces and religious hierarchies. Until nineteenth-century Islamic reform movements, mosque-centered Islam coexisted more or less harmoniously with saint and sufi.

Although overlapping, sufism and devotions to holy persons should not be conflated nor was the Muslim "saint" identical to Christian saints. There is no canonization process in either Judaism or Islam, and Muslim holy persons can be living or deceased. At the level of "popular" practices, however, differences among the three religions were attenuated. Many sacred sites or holy persons were venerated by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Throughout the centuries, Western European observers were shocked by the religiocultural promiscuity of Middle Eastern or North African saint cults that attracted believers from all three religions.

As was true in Christian Europe, popular rituals were also boisterous and profane. In 1388 veneration at Shaykh Inaba's shrine near Cairo included not only the prodigious consumption of wine by night—some 150 jugs—but also large numbers of women, or so those condemning the festival claimed. Small wonder that rumors of orgies ran riot through the city and the ulema protested vehemently. Irreligious behavior, equated with public immorality, was often used to explain natural disasters. When plague and famine hit Egypt in 1438, the ulema opined that "women in the streets" had provoked these catastrophes. Orders were issued for them to remain inside their homes.

Saint cults depend upon successful shrines where miracles, "the essential signs of the power of the saint," occur with "adequate frequency."³⁸ The supernatural events produced by extraordinary individuals attracted daily supplicants and visitors to neighborhood shrines or "corner saints" for succor. In sixteenth-century Istanbul, female supplicants tied themselves to the saint's powers through diverse rituals,

including “the lighting of candles, the driving of nails, the knotting of rags to nearby trees or window-bars, the rubbing of stones, the eating or drinking of earth or water from the holy site.”³⁹ Talismans to cure sickness, ward off evil, or confer blessings constituted concrete expressions of a saint’s healing grace. At Koyn Dede’s shrine in Ottoman Istanbul, custodians provided lamp oil to parents who believed that as long as the flame endured progeny would thrive. For centuries, Helvaji Baba’s tomb, also in Istanbul, was much frequented by barren women who “unwound cotton and laid it out in great loops as they prayed for the gift of a child.”⁴⁰ Holy persons served as spiritual patrons for large-scale entities such as guilds, urban quarters or towns. The thirteenth-century female ecstatic Lalla ‘A’isha Manubiya (who died in 1267) was venerated as the patron saint of Tunis due to her miraculous powers.

Sufism or Islamic mysticism, emerging in the late eighth or early ninth centuries C.E., celebrated women known for spiritual virtuosity. Sufism drew its original inspiration from the Prophet and his companions, whose lives were marked by ardent mystical sensibility. One historical impetus to mystical Islam was the very fact of military and state expansion. Ruling elites in the Abbasid Empire engaged in extravagant lifestyles and profane behavior that alienated the devout, providing impetus for ascetics and mystics.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, branches of sufi brotherhoods expanded across Persia, Mesopotamia, and, subsequently, the entire Muslim world. Scholars view the Mongol conquests as another major force in sufi expansion because the brotherhoods offset the devastations provoked by the invasions. Sufism developed institutionalized rituals, initiation rites, and doctrines expressed in literary genres, meditation practices, and artistic traditions. By the early modern era, hundreds of different sufi orders were found from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Before the twelfth century C.E., however, sufism tended toward the asceticism practiced by lone hermits or informally organized communities, including women. After that date in eastern Islamic lands, sufi retreats for women, often poor widows, were established, frequently built and endowed by elite women.

In the realm of sufism, women carved out sociosacred spaces not only as participants but also as exemplars and patrons. Some orders admitted females as members, although participation was normally subject to sexual segregation. Sufi women became focal points of collective veneration, although in medieval biographies they frequently lack a firm identity because many are unnamed. A few have remained paragons of virtue over the centuries. The mystic Rabi’a lived in the early Islamic period but still enjoys an international reputation. Born in Basra to an impoverished family, Rabi’a al-Adawiya (714?–801?) was abducted as a small child and sold into slavery. Her pious nature, however, convinced the slave-master to free her. Embracing celibacy, a somewhat unusual act, she retired to the desert to engage in extreme asceticism, attracting disciples through her holiness and doctrine of pure love. In contrast, contemporary male ascetics such as Hasan of Basra (who died in 728) sought union with a stern, fearsome divinity. Dread of hell informed their acts of self-abnegation. Rabi’a interpreted spiritual journeys as expressions of joy and love, and thus pilgrimage was a recurring theme in devotions to her. When asked if she loved the Prophet, Rabi’a rejoined that her love for God was greater than for any human.

Regarded as a saint, Rabi'a had numerous miracles, often associated with healing, nurturing, and supernatural light, attributed to her. She represented a critical stage in the formation of Islamic mysticism because the notions of divine passion and beatific vision were introduced into devotional practices and literatures. Rabi'a's life served as the model for an Islamic literary genre—an individual truth-seeker's heroic spiritual quest, which is a genre also found in Christianity. The first complete account of her life came from the thirteenth-century Persian writer Farid al-Din Attar, whose collection of sufi biographies included a lengthy entry on Rabi'a, the only woman cited. As with most male-authored works about saintly women, however, Attar molded her life to suit his own purposes. According to Attar (as well as other male Sufi writers), Rabi'a had become a man in order to achieve true spiritual progress: "No she wasn't a woman but a hundred men over."⁴¹

Yet often sufi women were portrayed, along with being women, as superior to male counterparts in both piety and gnosis. Sometime during the fourteenth century, legends about Rabi'a reached Europe, perhaps through Muslim Spain. The great thirteenth-century Spanish Muslim mystic Ibn 'Arabi wrote biographical accounts of sufi women, including Rabi'a, praising their spiritual powers. Rabi'a continues to have great appeal among Muslims, male and female, across the globe. Numerous biographies were composed about her during the twentieth century, and she was the subject of a feature-length film in Arabic. Most, if not all, contemporary sufi hagiographies contain extended entries on her life, celebrated as an exemplary form of internal, spiritual pilgrimage—a notion found in Christianity as well. Muslim feminists now use Rabi'a and other female mystics or erudites, as well as women from the Prophet's family, to argue for expanded female roles in Islamic worship, ritual, and scholarship.

CONCLUSION

Dealing with the topic of women, gender, and religion in comparative historical perspective represents an intellectual project of daunting magnitude. Attempts to illuminate a relationship that is this ancient, vast, and complex may seem doomed in advance to defeat—or at best to banal generalizations that flatten the richness of humankind's spiritual quests over time. Still, the theme of exemplary women and sacred journeys in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam offers an aperture into religion as lived, received, taught, and understood.

During the periods under consideration, the ideal woman in all three traditions was remarkably similar—indeed, that immense religiocultural and social construct represented by the exemplary female remained in force until very recently. Beneath the ideology of the passive, silent, obedient, and chaste woman, however, existed historical realities that continually posed problems to theologians, moralists, rabbis, and ulema. Prescriptive literature, almost exclusively written by men, reveals that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women did not conform to the ideal—far from it; otherwise, the continual reminders of duty and obligation, the constant condemnations of immoral or impious behavior, would have been unnecessary.

In addition, historical conjunctures—crises, upheavals, or subterranean shifts in social hierarchies and political systems—offered opportunities to contest in myriad ways injunctions against women exercising spiritual and moral authority. The Crusades, the Reconquista, Mongol invasions, the disintegration of empires or rebellions against states, as well as movements of religious revival or reform—frequently condemned as heresy—produced breaches in the patriarchal armature of the three monotheistic religions from which both women and men profited, if only momentarily. Nevertheless, social rank and status played a significant role in conferring a voice and historical identity upon individual women. Some methods of spiritual and sociosexual enclosure for women—the home, convent or sufi lodge, and the celibate state—paradoxically created opportunities for learning and acquiring a voice. A few women, such as Margery Kempe, used that voice to openly criticize the practices of specific religious authorities and, although less frequently, male spiritual authority in general.

Finally, pilgrimage of various kinds permitted sacred (and worldly) travel to honor the very special dead or living holy persons. Often, the fact of pilgrimage would enhance an individual woman's sociospiritual status in the community. By undertaking sacred movement, women and men affirmed their identity as spiritual persons, often at nonofficial sites or unsanctioned shrines, and sought to shape their destinies in this world and the next. In some cases the special virtue of female exemplars or the miraculous powers of holy persons have been commemorated over time and preserved through organized rituals and memory.

What distinguishes the premodern historical periods dealt with here is not merely that more and more women today are now educated in scriptures or sacred texts. Rather, these texts themselves are seen as historical constructs and therefore subject to exegetical reinterpretation. More important, women scriptural scholars, along with like-minded male counterparts, now engage in intense debates over the gendered nature of religion, the religious experience, and authority. The acceptance of these reinterpretations, at least in some quarters, represents a fundamental change. The process is underway not only in the religious communities studied in this essay but also in other traditions such as Buddhism. In Thailand, for example, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a woman scholar of Buddhism, in the late twentieth century renounced marriage and family to follow Buddha's path. She assumed a new name, Dhammananda (the joy of righteousness) and the novel identity as an ordained monk. Due to enormous opposition in her own homeland, however, she traveled to Sri Lanka for ordination because the Buddhist hierarchy in Thailand maintains that only men can become monks. To attain spiritual fulfillment as well as socioreligious recognition of her spiritual goals, the "joy of righteousness" employed strategies that combined scriptural authority and global feminism with active refusal to submit to national male religious authorities. Perhaps this approach to women, gender, and religion is indicative of what the future can hold.

NOTES

Invaluable intellectual sustenance was provided by my colleagues at the University of Arizona: Karen Anderson, Alan Bernstein, Gail Bernstein, Linda Darling, Ruth Dickstein, Esther Fuchs, Donna Guy, Susan Karant-Numm, Helen Nader, Mary Spiedel, and Charles D. Smith. This essay is dedicated to Nikki R. Keddie of the University of California at Los Angeles, who taught me about women, gender, and comparative history.

1. Elizabeth Isichei, "Does Christianity Empower Women? The Case of the Anaguta of Central Nigeria," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, vol. 11 of *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 209–28, quotation on 209.
2. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 6.
3. Ross E. Dunn, "Gender in World History," in *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion*, ed. Ross E. Dunn (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 441–45, quotation on 441.
4. Riffat Hassan, "Challenging the Stereotypes of Fundamentalism: An Islamic Feminist Perspective," *Muslim World* 91 (spring 2001): 55–69, quotation on 59–60.
5. Miriam B. Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 101.
6. Leslie C. Orr, "Laity," in *The Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion* (hereafter *EWWR*), ed. in chief Serinity Young, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1999), 2: 567–69, quotation on 567.
7. Diane M. Sharon, "Eve," in *EWWR*, 1: 319–20, quotation on 319.
8. Nancy J. Barnes, "Evil," in *EWWR*, 1: 320–22, quotation on 321.
9. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, eds., *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 2.
10. Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 146, quotation on 143.
11. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 5: *The Individual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 164.
12. Barbara Geller, "Roman, Byzantine, and Sassanian Judaism," in *EWWR*, 1: 534–38, quotation on 536.
13. Reinhold C. Mueller, "The Jewish Moneylenders of Late Trecento Venice: A Revisitation," in *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Benjamin Arbel (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 209.
14. Judith Baskin, "Judaism: In the Middle Ages," in *EWWR*, 1: 538–40, quotation on 540.
15. Susan Starr Sered, "Our Mother Rachel," in *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions* (1996) 4: 1–56, quotation on 21.
16. Rachel Simon, *Change within Tradition among Jewish Women in Libya* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 157–58.
17. Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 22.
18. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 54, emphasis in the original.

19. Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 192.
20. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 317.
21. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 24.
22. Matthew C. Bagger, "Mysticism," in *EWWR*, 2: 699–701, quotation on 700.
23. See Kathryn Norberg's review of two films devoted to the Maid of Orléans, "Joan on the Screen: Burned Again?" *Perspectives* 38 (February 2000): 1, 8–9.
24. Anne L. Clark, "Virgin Mary," in *EWWR*, 2: 1004–6, quotation on 1004.
25. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story," in *The Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth Sommer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 36–59, quotation on 46.
26. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 25.
27. Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 82.
28. Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage*, 79.
29. Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections from Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 138.
30. Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 227.
31. Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 161–62.
32. Maura O'Neill, "Celibacy," in *EWWR*, 1: 143–45, quotation on 143.
33. Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 267.
34. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 235–36.
35. Guity Nashat and Judith E. Tucker, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 62.
36. Huda Lutfi, "Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Shar'i Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 99–121, quotation on 99.
37. Lutfi, "Manners and Customs," 100.
38. Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27–28.
39. Rafaela Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey* (New York: Dorset Press, 1971), 50.
40. Lewis, *Everyday Life*.
41. Marcia K. Hermansen, "The Female Hero in Islamic Religious Tradition," *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, vol. 2: *Heroic Women*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 111–43, quotation on 130; Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 91–113 (a chapter devoted to female mystics).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GENERAL WORKS

- Abbott, Elizabeth. *A History of Celibacy*. New York: Scribners, 2000.
- . *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991–92.
- Bowersock, G. W., Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Davis, Nathalie Zemon. *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- . *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. 1985– .
- King, Ursula. *Religion and Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Sharma, Arvind, ed. *Women Saints in World Religions*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000.
- Sharma, Arvind, and Katherine K. Young, eds. *Heroic Women*. Vol. 2 of *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992.
- , eds. *Feminism and World Religions*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1999.
- Weber, Michael C. "A Humanistic Approach to Teaching Religion in the World History Class." *World History Bulletin* 16 (spring 2000): 26–28.
- Young, Serinity, ed. *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion*. 2 vols. New York: Macmillan Reference, 1999. Articles consulted by Howard Adelman, Ghazala Anwar, Ellen L. Babinsky, Denise N. Baker, Janet L. Bauer, Lois Beck, Francine Cardman, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Jill Dubisch, Carole R. Fontaine, Erica C. Gelser, Riffat Hassan, Judith Hauptman, Susannah Heschel, Ursula King, Kim Knott, Amy Lavine, Vasiliki Limberis, Ann E. Matter, Jo Ann Kay McNamara, Kathleen O'Grady, Jacqueline Pastis, Jennifer Rycenga, Jennifer; Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh and Henry J. Walker, Jane I. Smith, Gail Corrington Streete, Francis V. Tiso, and Judith Wegner Romney.

JUDAISM

- Ackerman, Susan. *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
- Baskin, Judith. *Gender and Jewish Studies*. New York: Biblio Press, 1994.
- , ed. *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*. 2d ed. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1998.
- . *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1994.
- Ben-Ami, Ibrahim, S. Morag, and Norman Stillman, eds. *Studies in Judaism and Islam*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981.
- Brenner, Athalya. *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and "Sexuality" in the Hebrew Bible*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997.
- Brooten, Bernadette. *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982.
- Cohen, Mark. *Under Crescent and Cross*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Fuchs, Esther. *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*. Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000.

- . "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative." *Mankind Quarterly* 23 (winter 1982): 149–60.
- Goldberg, Harvey E., ed. *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Hirschberg, H. Z. *A History of the Jews in North Africa*. 2 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.
- Levy, Avigdor. *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1994.
- Levy, Habib. *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora*. Los Angeles: Mazda Press, 1999.
- Marcus, Jacob R., ed. *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book*. 1938. Reprint. Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1960.
- Meyers, Carol L. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Neusner, Jacob. *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women*. Vol. 5: The Mishnaic System of Women. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980.
- , Tamara Sonn, and Jonathan E. Brockopp. *Judaism and Islam in Practice: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Rodrigue, Aron, ed. *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Udovitch, Abraham L., and Lucette Valensi. *The Last Arab Jews*. New York, N.Y.: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1984.

CHRISTIANITY

- Bilinkoff, Jodi. *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate, and Timea Szell, eds. *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Brock, Sebastian, and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, trans. *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- . *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- . *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- . *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Cooper, Kate. *The Virgin and the Bride*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Hummel, Thomas, and Ruth Hummel. *Patterns of the Sacred: English Protestant and Russian Orthodox Pilgrims of the Nineteenth Century*. London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. London: SPCK, 1995.
- James, Liz, ed. *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*. London: Routledge, 1997.

- Karant-Nunn, Susan C. *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Edited by W. Butler-Bowdon. London: Cape, 1936.
- Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane. *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Kors, Alan C., and Edward Peters, eds. *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.
- Nader, Helen, ed. *Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Nolan, Mary Lee, and Sidney Nolan. *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Peers, E. Allison, trans. *The Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus*. 2 vols. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1951.
- Porrete, Marguerite. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Translated by Ellen L. Babinsky. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.
- Scaraffia, Lucetta, and Gabriella Zarri, eds. *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Schutte, Anne Jacobson, ed. and trans. *Aspiring Saints: Pretense of Holiness, Inquisition, and Gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- . *Autobiography of an Aspiring Saint: The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Solterer, Helen. *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Staley, Lynn. *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Weinstein Donald, and Rudolph M. Bell. *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Wiesner, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Wilkinson, John. *Itinerarium Egeriae: Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*. Warminster, U.K.: Aris and Phillips, 1981.
- . *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1988.

ISLAM

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Boddy, Janice Patricia. *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Callaway, Barbara, and Lucy Creevey. *The Heritage of Islam: Women, Religion, and Politics in West Africa*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1994.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia. "The Middle East in World History." *World History Bulletin* 9 (fall–winter 1992): 30–34.
- . *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

- . "The Shaykh and His Daughter: Coping in Colonial Algeria." In *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Edmund Burke III. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- . "A Visit to a Tunisian Harem." *Journal of Maghrebi Studies* 1–2 (spring 1993): 43–49.
- Denny, Frederick Mathewson. *An Introduction to Islam*. 2d ed. New York: Macmillan, 1994.
- Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2d ed., 8 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960– .
- Esposito, John L. *Women in Muslim Family Law*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982.
- Evans, Charles T., and Julia Clancy-Smith, eds. *Studies in Islamic History and Cultures*. Special issue of *The Community College Humanities Review* (1997).
- Gulbadan Begum, *The History of Humayun*. Trans. Anne Beveridge. Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delli, 1972.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, and John L. Esposito, eds. *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Haeri, Shahla. *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi' Iran*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1989.
- Hambly, Gavin R. G., ed. *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Keddie, Nikki R., and Lois Beck, eds. *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- . "The Past and Present of Women in the Muslim World." *Journal of World History* 1 (spring 1990): 77–108.
- Keddie, Nikki R., and Beth Baron, eds. *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Kenyon, Susan M. *Five Women of Sennar: Culture and Change in Central Sudan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Lapidus, Ira M. *A History of Muslim Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- . *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Lifchez, Raymond, ed. *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Meriwether, Margaret L., and Judith E. Tucker, eds. *Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999.
- Nashat, Guity, and Judith E. Tucker. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa*. 2d ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Robinson, Francis. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Roded, Ruth, ed. *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader*. London: I. B. Tauris, 1999.
- Rosander, Eva Evers, and David Westerlund, eds. *African Islam and Islam in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997.
- Ruggles, D. Fairchild, ed. *Women, Patronage, and Self-Representation in Islamic Societies*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000.
- Shoshan, Boaz. *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

- Smith, Grace Martin, and Carl W. Ernst, eds. *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*. Istanbul: Isis Press, 1994.
- Smith, Margaret. *Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*. 1928. Reprint. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Spellberg, Denise A. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'ishah Bint Abi Bakr*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Strobel, Margaret. *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890–1975*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press 1979.
- Tucker, Judith E. *In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Wadud-Muhsin, Amina. *Woman and Qur'an: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Walther, Wiebke. *Women in Islam*. London: George Prior, 1981.

AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS AND ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Videos

- Medieval Women*. Twenty-four minutes. New York: Insight Media, 1989.
- Religion*. Series with more than a hundred titles representing all religious traditions of the world. New York: Insight Media.
- Socio-Historical Gender Roles*. Four videos, each sixty minutes. New York: Insight Media, 1994.
- Women in History*. Fifty-eight minutes. New York: Insight Media, 1994.
- Women in Islam*. Sixty minutes. New York: Insight Media, 1997.

CD-ROMs, Databases, Electronic Journals, and Web Sites

- American Theological Library Association (ATLA) Database [ATLAReligion].
- Diotima*. Materials for the Study of Women and Gender in the Ancient World Web site.
- The Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM edition.
- Historical Abstracts*. CD-ROM and online.
- Fordham University. Internet Modern History Sourcebook Web site at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html/>.
- Iter Database. Abstracts of three hundred scholarly journal titles on the late Middle Ages and Renaissance at <http://www.itergateway.org/>.
- Matrix*. Resources for the Study of Women's Religious Communities Web site.
- Renaissance Women Online Web site at <http://www.brown.edu/texts/rwoentry.html>.
- The Witchcraft Bibliography Project [early modern Europe] Web site at: [http://hist.unt.edu/witch.html/](http://hist.unt.edu/witch.html).
- Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* at <http://www.utoronto.ca/wjudaism/>. Published only on the Internet.
- Women's History Review* at <http://www.triangle.co.uk/whr/index.htm/>. Electronic journal.
- Women's Studies International available in CD-ROM and on the Web.

Additional Copies may be ordered from:

Publication Sales
American Historical Association
400 A Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003-3889
Telephone: (202) 544-2422
Fax: (202) 544-8307
E-mail: pubsales@historians.org
Web page: <http://www.historians.org>

See inside for other titles in this essay series



P8-CAN-898

